

Coventry Diocesan Synod – 2 July 2024 – Minutes

A meeting of the Coventry Diocesan Synod, took place on Tuesday 2 July 2024 at **6.45pm at St John's, Westwood.**

The meeting of the Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Coventry, opened under the Standing Orders 2009. The President, the Acting Bishop of Coventry, The Rt Revd Ruth Worsley, took the Chair.

1. Opening prayer and worship

The Revd Charles Higgins and Helen Bryant, chaplains to Diocesan Synod led evening prayer in the Garden of Hope.

2. Welcome, notices and apologies for absence

Bishop Ruth welcomed everyone to the final diocesan synod of the current triennium. At the start of the meeting apologies had been received from 11 clergy and 12 laity.

3. Minutes (DS 24-08)

The minutes of the Diocesan Synod meeting held on 9 March 2024 were **approved**.

4. Presidential address

Bishop Ruth addressed synod, noting there is much for which to thank God. The full presidential address can be read at <https://www.coventry.anglican.org/news/presidential-address-to-diocesan-synod--july-2024>

The Chair of the House of Laity, Mr Phil Swards took the chair.

5. Promulgation of Amending Canon No. 43 (DS 24-09)

Geoffrey Cotterill, Diocesan Registrar, gave notice that at its February 2024 group of sessions, the General Synod resolved that Amending Canon No. 43 be made, promulgated and executed.

Standing orders suspended to enable synod to meet as the members of the CDBF Ltd.

AGM AGENDA

The Annual General Meeting of the Coventry Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd

Steve Coomber, CDBF Chair addressed Synod:

"The Annual Report & Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2023 before you were scrutinised by a combined meeting of the Diocesan Finance Group, the Audit and Risk Committee and Crowe, the appointed auditors after they completed their audit. Once again, the audit was clean with no matters raised by the auditors. They were approved by Bishop's Council in their role as directors at their meeting on June 3rd and are now presented to Synod as members of the Coventry Diocesan Board of Finance.

The year ending 2023 has been one of significant change within the Diocese, perhaps most keenly illustrated by the changes we have seen in our episcopal oversight, with the retirement of Bishop John Stroyan as our Suffragan Bishop then, in early November, Bishop Christopher left to follow his call to become the Dean of Windsor and the Right Reverend Bishop Ruth joined us as the Acting Bishop of Coventry, supported by Bishop Saju.

I would like to thank all those involved in the preparation of these accounts – the finance team, Jacqueline Ladds, Andy Waddams and especially Helen Grocock and to those who made contributions in other ways. I would also like to give thanks and recognition to Simon Danks who, after 3 years as the Chair of the Coventry Diocesan Board of Finance, left to become the Chief Operating Officer of the Cathedral.

These continue to be financially challenging times for our parishes and we are immensely grateful to our congregations for their generosity and for the exceptional work of our volunteer treasurers. Their combined efforts meant we received £5.1m in parish share, which represents a small increase from 2022. This, combined with the income from our investments, enabled us to maintain our clergy and curate numbers, look after their

vicarages, and provide ongoing ministerial development and support for them and our self-supporting ministers, lay licensed readers and clergy with permission to officiate. This generosity also helped to resource mission and ministry across the Diocese, and enable a warm welcome to over 14,000 worshippers, and facilitate more than 2,400 weddings, funerals and baptisms.

The financial result for 2023 was a deficit before investment gains of £1.3m. This was offset by both the release of £2.8m of unallocated historic funds (in line with the Diocesan Synod approval in November 2022) and investment revaluations gains of £3.6m leading to an overall increase in total funds for the year of £2.3m. Total funds at the end of the year were £96.4m.

Income during the year, before the release of historic funds, was £10.3m versus £11.1m in 2022. Although parish share income increased from £4.8m to £5.1m in the period this was more than offset by reductions in receipts from Church Commissioners and other grants and donations.

At £5.1m parish share income represents a significant proportion of our income and we are working with Deaneries to improve communication and encourage positive dialogue where there are difficulties in meeting obligations. Other sources of funding in 2023 came from investment income of £2.6m, Church Commissioners £1.0m and £1.6m from other.

Total expenditure in 2023 was £11.7m, a reduction of £0.4m compared to expenditure of £12.1m in 2022 as detailed in Note 5 on page 36. Budgeted expenditure for 2023 was £12.1m.

Work continues in response to the financial situation. The DBF are in the fortunate position of having a healthy set of reserves and a working group has been established to work towards a sustainable financial position whilst we retain support for all DBF commitments including supporting clergy, the cathedral, DBE, and reaching Net Zero.

More information and detail can be found in the notes to the financial statements.

Towards the end of last year, Diocesan Synod approved the budget for 2024. With generous stewardship and good fiscal management, we have been able to budget a slight increase in parish share offers and a reduction in the release of historic funds. We have also been able to manage costs, resulting in just a 2% increase in overall expenditure. The central commitment within the budget is to ensure the Board of Finance is appropriately resourced to enable it to continue to serve and support the life of our parishes, schools, and the Cathedral, as well as our clergy and laity.

I would like to thank everyone across the Diocese for their continued commitment to our mission purpose and for their prayers as we seek to advance the Kingdom of God."

Questions:

The auditors highlighted greatest risk as income recognition, management controls and fraud. Are we making good income recognition by management?

Noel Grace, Interim Director of Finance, responded that auditors make general comments that apply to all organisations. We do recognise that there have been changes within the finance department, controls have been put in and the level of control has improved. Income recognition has not raised any specific issues.

In 2023 there was less spend on clergy housing, the difference could have been spent on net zero initiatives for clergy housing, why has it been reduced?

Steve Coomber responded that spend peaked in 2022 due to catching up with repairs following the COVID pandemic.

6. As the members of the Board of Finance, Synod were asked to consider the following items:

- i) The minutes of the AGM held on 20 June 2023 (DS 24-10) were approved.
- ii) The Chair of the DBF proposed that:
 - "The Annual Report & Financial Statements for the year ended 31 Dec 2023 be received" (DS 24-11)
Approved unanimously
 - "The appointment of Crowe UK LLP, auditor of the company, shall be renewed until the next Annual General Meeting, and that the Directors be authorised to fix the remuneration of the Auditor"
Approved unanimously

7. Diocesan Board of Education Annual Report & Financial Statements (DS 24-12)

April Gold, Diocesan Director of Education provided an update on the legacy of Alive 2023 – Staying Alive. Continuing the partnership with iSingPOP, the DBE have a dedicated iSingPOP worker, Emma Kenyon who to date has led on: 7 main events, 14 workshops, the Fosse MAT Jamboree, two year 6 leavers' events, conducted an interview project, attended MotoFest and led worship at the Head Teacher Conference, and there is much more planned including every school receiving a new Pop-box. So far this has impacted 52 schools, with 29 workshops for 4,000 children, 16 main events for 3,500 families, leavers services for 120 rural families, a jamboree for 800 children and classroom worship and Pop-box for 15,000 children. This means that the £76,000 cost equates to £5 per child. April shared a video which included some of the initial findings of the interview project, this showed how much children enjoy singing and dancing together and how they like to celebrate each other's success. The children also have ideas of how to get their parents involved with church. Feedback has also been received from school staff, that they are also on a faith journey alongside their pupils.

The DBE have continued to share the learning from the Beacon Project, working with children who are underprivileged and from deprived backgrounds, helping to raise their attainment and be present in school. The DBE also strives to ensure that all children know what 'church' means above their school door.

Mike Draper reflected that it is a privilege to be appointed to the role of DBE Chair and commented that there will be another Alive in the future. He expressed thanks to April and the DBE team, and to Colin Angus, Net Zero Carbon Project Officer, who is working with schools across the diocese to reduce their carbon footprint as it is recognised that schools have the largest carbon footprints of diocesan activities.

The Chair of the DBE, Mike Draper, introduced and moved the motion "that the Report and Financial Statements of Coventry Diocesan Board of Education for the year ended 31 Dec 2023 be noted."

Noted

8. Diocesan Board of Education Election of Members (DS 24-13a, b)

Mike Draper moved the motion:

This Synod resolves that:

"Timetable and date for the election

1. The nomination period will run from Monday 4 November 2024 to Tuesday 19 November 2024.
2. If more than five persons stand for election Synod members will vote for candidates. If so required, the election period will run from Thursday 21 November 2024 to Friday 6 December 2024.

Manner in which the election is to be conducted

1. Candidates should complete the Nomination Form. A proposer and seconder should sign the form.
2. The Diocesan Synod shall elect a minimum of four and not more than five persons, and one of whom shall be a clerk in holy orders or licensed in the diocese, but none of whom need be members of the Diocesan Synod.
3. If more than five persons stand for election, Synod members will vote for candidates.
4. Votes for candidates who are either a clerk in holy orders or licensed in the diocese shall be counted first and the candidate with the highest number of votes will be elected.
5. The remaining candidates who are either a clerk in holy orders or licensed in the diocese will then be added to the other candidates and the four candidates with the highest number of votes will be elected.

Period to be served

Candidates will begin a 3-year term of office on 1 January 2025, to end on 31 December 2027."

Carried unanimously

Bishop Ruth noted appreciation for April Gold, Mike Draper and team for the incredible work.

The Chair of the House of Clergy, Revd Claire McArthur, took the chair.

9. Governance Review (DS 24-14)

Jacqueline Ladds emphasised that this work has been reviewed and approved by Bishop's Council. DS 24-14 sets out the work which has been conducted over the last year in order to refresh the committee structure, the main focus has been the committee which deals with finance, risk and audit as here there was greatest duplication between committees. There are three technicalities as outlined in the motion for Diocesan Synod to approve as recommended by Bishop's Council.

Phil Swards moved the motion:

That this Synod, following the recommendation of its Standing Committee:

- a) Approve the Management Scheme under the Repair of Benefice Buildings Measure as laid out in Appendix A
Approved unanimously
- b) Approve the Management Scheme under the Church Property Measure as laid out in Appendix B.
Approved unanimously
- c) Approve the change to Standing Order 72B as laid out in Appendix C
Approved unanimously

10. Our Shared Future – Loving One Another (DS 24-15)

The Revd Gail Philip, Associate Archdeacon, as a member of the first cohort of mediators for the Conflict Transformation Group explained the aims and progress for the establishing Conflict Transformation Group as outlined in DS 24-15. Place for Hope who have experience in the church context is the leading and training organisation. Trained mediators will be assigned to cases in pairs. Initially a pair will consist of a mediator from Place for Hope and from our first cohort but this will evolve through training to be pairs from our Conflict Transformation Group. The referral process for a situation to receive mediators is via the archdeacons' team who will triage cases. Gail shared a video from a participant, who highlighted that this is a key ministry, It is not a rescue mission but a facilitated process to empower people.

Questions:

Is there a cost to parishes to use this service?

There is no cost to parishes. Proceeds from the sale of Offa House have provided the funding for this service.

Is this a Coventry Diocese initiative or is this available in other dioceses, can we have cross learning?

Other dioceses have similar initiatives but Coventry is a pioneer and we will be sharing experience with others.

Have any conflicts been engaged with yet?

One case is just about to start mediation.

How can synod help?

Recruitment, could you or someone you know join the second cohort of trainees to be mediators? Please share the information it is open to clergy and laity.

11. Triennium Review (DS 24-15)

Synod were given the opportunity to discuss the joys and challenges of the last three year and what we can learn for the future. Written feedback was collected.

12. A New Financial Settlement (DS 24-16)

Bishop Ruth emphasised that the motion that she has been asked to propose is a friendly motion and is not 'doing away' with the debate that synod had on this matter in March 2024, producing the Shipston motion. This motion is seeking strength as 18 other dioceses share the same concern. There is a long list of motions to be considered by General Synod but by dioceses collaborating there is a chance of a motion reaching General Synod sooner as increasing the number of dioceses supporting the motion gives the motion higher precedence. This motion is led by Gloucester and Hereford Dioceses and asks for the redistribution of funds so parishes can do ministry and mission in context and is about funding the day to day. This motion calls for the redistribution of funds and for the DBF to manage how the funds are used to allow growth and sustainability.

Questions and comments:

Clarification was sought regarding clergy pension decline and concern expressed for how this could impact recruitment.

The National Church decide clergy pensions and stipends. This is separate to the clergy pension fund. The funds sought for redistribution are the profits obtained from the investment of funds and not the pension pot. There will still be money for future stipends and pensions.

How will we be sure the funds will be used in a mixed way?

The DBF are to ensure the funds are used across the whole diocese, we will need to consider a strategic budget and ring fencing in a similar way to LInCs. It was highlighted that it is the purpose of Diocesan Synod to hold the DBF to account.

Would it be better if the National Church continue to manage the investment and we are given the revenue to use?

30 years ago, the National Church did not manage the investment well. They are doing better and creating support funds such as SMIB and Net Zero which is fantastic but this is coming down to the fact that we have a diverse diocese with many different needs and circumstances. This motion would provide funds to 'help keep the show on the road'. We helped the National Church when they needed help and we are now asking them to help us. We are fortunate to have our own investments and historical reserves but not every diocese is as fortunate.

Bishop Ruth moved the motion:

That this Synod

"a) call upon the Church Commissioners and Archbishops' Council to undertake everything necessary to effect a redistribution of financial resources directly to Diocesan Stipend Funds to reflect the value of contributions made by Diocesan Boards of Finance to the Church of England Funded Pension Scheme since it was established by the settlement of 1997 (£2.6 billion); and

b) call upon Diocesan Boards of Finance to manage the funds redistributed as a result of the above to support parish ministry in the ways discerned locally to be most effective in enabling growth and sustaining the Church of England's commitment to be a Christian presence in every community."

Approved with 1 abstention.

Further to the approval of the above motion, the Revd George Heighton confirmed that he is seeking to withdraw the motion brought by Shipston Deanery in favour of the proposed motion as there is more weight if diocese work together.

The Revd George Heighton moved the motion that this Synod:

Withdraw the motion approved on 9 March 2024 as follows

“That this synod, mindful of the dire financial situation of many parishes who are exhausting their reserves and, at a time when the national church is reviewing the funding it offers to dioceses:

- a) seeks the Church Commissioners to increase its share of annual running costs.
- b) will submit a diocesan synod motion (DSM) to General Synod, requesting increases in funding in specific areas in particular rural ministry and mission or lowest income communities or buildings for mission funding or grants, similar to the 2022 energy grants, which can be distributed by Dioceses to PCCs to directly support our parishes in areas where it is needed most.”

Approved unanimously.

13. Questions received under Standing Order 69

No questions received

14. Papers to note

DAC annual report **(DS 24-17) noted**

15. Meeting Dates – all locations to be confirmed

Sat 16 Nov 2024 (morning)

PROVISIONAL 2025 dates - Sat 15 Mar, Tues 8 Jul, Sat 22 Nov

Claire McArthur thanked everyone who has served in this triennium and those not standing again. She highlighted that vacancies remain for some deaneries and we need a diverse synod.

Bishop Ruth thanked the chairs before leading the closing prayer which thanked the Lord for his presence over the last triennium and blessed those standing down, returning and soon to be new members.

The meeting closed at 21:05.