

Coventry Diocesan Synod – 16 NOVEMBER 2024 – Minutes

The minutes for a meeting of the Coventry Diocesan Synod, which was held on **Saturday 16 November** at **9.30am at Hope Hall, Harris Church of England Academy, Overslade Lane, Rugby.**

The opening of the meeting of the Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Coventry, 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

Led by the Revd Charles Higgins and Helen Bryant, chaplains to Diocesan Synod, based on Luke; the Road to Emmaus.

2. Notices and apologies for absence

11 apologies from the House of Clergy and 5 apologies from the House of Laity.

3. Minutes (DS 24-19)

The minutes of the Diocesan Synod meeting held on 2 July 2024 were **approved**.

4. Presidential address and welcome

Bishop Ruth welcomed the new Diocesan Synod and addressed synod. The full presidential address can be read at <https://www.coventry.anglican.org/news/presidential-address-to-diocesan-synod-november-2024.php>

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

5. General Synod feedback

An introduction to General Synod (DS 24-20) was provided for information and the Revd Canon Kate Massey gave further background information on General Synod before providing an overview of the July 2024 General Synod session which included:

- Law changes relating to Chancel Repair Liability and cathedrals.
- Discussing the National Church Governance Measure aims to streamline the National Church Institutions.
- Safeguarding, which is always a significant topic at Synod, focused on discussions around the recent Soul Survivor situation.
- Human sexuality: “Churches who choose to are now at liberty to offer prayers for couples in committed, loving same-sex relationships as part of regular worship. Orders of Service for stand-alone services are not yet authorized. There are ongoing conversations about what pastoral advice will accompany them. Particular sticking points are whether licensed ministers, lay or ordained, are allowed to be in civil marriages. Another issue is what provision must be in place for those who do not want to offer the Prayers of Love and Faith.”
- Synod finished with a session on Hearing the Voices of Young People, including young people from Coventry.

Questions and comments:

Looking forward, what do you see?

Bishop Ruth responded that the Business Committee of General Synod will be meeting in January to prepare the February sessions. 2025 will see work in LLF which will need discussion at Diocesan Synods and so there is likely to be an additional Coventry Diocesan Synod meeting in the spring. PLF will possibly be on the agenda at the February General Synod with voting at the July or November General Synod as it is not clear what business will be needed in terms of Justin Welby’s resignation, General Synod could be affected but business as usual will be strived for.

Would it help General Synod Reps if we have discussions in Diocesan Synod first for the big issues?

We would not have the information given the timescales of Diocesan and General Synod. Items could be shared in the Bulletin and the General Synod agenda made available so any expertise or concerns could be shared with General Synod members for information and guidance. It was reiterated that the members are elected in their own right and are not delegates.

Prayers are requested for those who are developing safeguarding guides, deciding who qualifies for compensation and prayers for those affected.

6. Introduction to a new Diocesan Synod

The Chairs of the Houses of Laity and Clergy spoke to the new Diocesan Synod, explaining the working of synod within the governance framework, outlining its key aims, purposes and responsibilities, and encouraging all members to fully engage and participate. Further information can be found in the Members' Resource Area, a link for which has been shared with all members.

7. 2025 Budget for the Coventry Diocesan Board of Finance (DS 24-21)

Steve Coomber, CDBF Chair, welcomed Karen Birch, the new Director of Finance, and provided an overview of the 2025 budget which was prepared by Karen Birch and Noel Grace, Interim Director of Finance prior to the Autumn Budget 2024. It has been reviewed by the Diocesan Finance Group and Investment Sub Committee and is recommended for approval by Bishop's Council.

It was highlighted that as last year, the DBF continue to operate at a deficit. For 2025 the budget is set for a total expenditure of £14.2m and income of £10.5m. The current challenging economic climate is taking effect with increased inflation, NI and overall costs but DBF income is static resulting in an increasing budget deficit. The main income, Parish Share, £5.2m, has remained flat since 2017 (attributed to covid impacts, and the demographics of congregations). The DBF is fortunate to have investment income, £2.5m, which includes the Glebe portfolio and CCLA investments. In 2025 previously drawn but unused unapplied total return will be used to bridge the gap between income and expenditure. The largest expense is £11.5m for supporting mission and ministry. Clergy numbers will be maintained in line with deanery plans. There will be an uplift in stipends but the detail of this is subject to change due to the Autumn Budget 2024.

The 2025 DBF budget reflects our commitment to DBF strategic priorities which includes church growth, supporting our parishes and Net Zero 2030. Work continues on the long-term financial plan, exploring income generation, spirit of generosity, post creativity, asset performance, cost effectiveness and a significant funding bid from National Church with the support of a new Bishop and permanent Director of Finance. A working group is currently assessing Parish Share.

The presentation slides are available at: <https://www.coventry.anglican.org/about/more-about-us/governance/diocesan-synod/diocesan-synod--meeting-information.php>

Questions and comments:

Given the current safeguarding climate, how much do the DBF spend on safeguarding and will some be set aside to support what may come?

There is an increase in the safeguarding budget (£21k increase compared to 2024) as the team have increased in headcount to the equivalent of 5.4 people. Safeguarding is a significant risk on the risk register which is kept under review. There are 170 Parish Safeguarding Officers, we have 207 parishes and so there is a deficit, please encourage volunteers at parish level.

Is it operational deficit? What is being invested in the future?

Appendix 1 of DS 24-21 breaks down the areas of the budget. £1.4m is budgeted for the Growth Strategy including Urban Plants and Missions Hubs although there is also grant income and LiNC

funding for these projects. A grant of £1.25m match funding for Urban Plants was recognised in 2022 but expenses continue into 2024 and will continue in 2025. This mismatch of timing makes the 2025 deficit appear bigger than it is.

New National Insurance and minimum pay levels will also affect parish budgets.

Parish Share has been a flat income for a long time, it is not going to get easier for parishes and cutting clergy will not help, will money be found from investments or central? What is the direction?

The Parish Share working group will be delving into the full mechanics of Parish Share. The long term financial plan looks to other sources of income and asset performance, cost effectiveness will be assessed over the next 12-18 months.

To put the deficit into context, how does it fit against congregation decline?

Over the last 10 years congregations have reduced by over 20% but in Coventry there has been a 9.5% increase between 2022 and 2023 but overall there is still a downward trajectory.

It has been heard that some churches who do not support PLF are being encouraged to pay parish Share into a ring-fenced fund – the Ephesians Fund, are any churches in this diocese doing this?

The DBF are aware of one parish paying Parish Share through the Ephesians Fund.

The Chair of the DBF introduced and moved the motion -

That this Synod:

- *Approve the 2025 budget, as recommended by Bishop's Council*
- *Authorise expenditure in 2025 up to a maximum of £14.232m*
- *Note the use of unapplied total return approved in prior years*

Vote:

For: 79

Against: 0

Abstentions: 1

Motion carried

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

8. Diocesan Strategy Our Shared Future

Jaqueline Ladds shared how wonderful our diocese is with just under 1 million people, of which 70% live across the four urban areas and two thirds of our parishes are classed as rural or semi-rural and home to two major universities. To service this we have committed clergy with a breadth of experience and amazing volunteers yet there are currently many challenges. Challenges include only 1.6% of the population attending a CofE Church in the diocese and 50% of churches have fewer than 3 under 16-year olds.

The Ven Barry Dugmore shared how our purpose and vision for transforming communities led to our current 5 year growth strategy which was heavily influenced by covid and vision around John 10:10 although further engagement is needed to refresh and extend the strategy into a long term plan. Prayers are requested to support this work as we ready ourselves for the arrival of Bishop Sophie. The presentation slides can be viewed at <https://www.coventry.anglican.org/about/more-about-us/governance/diocesan-synod/diocesan-synod--meeting-information.php>

Bishop Ruth led a reflection on John 10:10 as part of discerning our vision, synod were invited to share which three words spoke to them from the passage via mentimeter, the results are represented in this word cloud:

The Net Zero underspend in 2024 is not being carried forward, how can this be rectified?

2024 underspend is not carried forward, in line with usual financial practice. The overall 2025 net zero budget is an increase on the 2024 allocation.

Projects can take a long time, start planning early

All are urged to start thinking and planning now for the work that may be needed in their parishes, particularly where buildings are listed which adds further complexity. All are urged to consult the DAC in the early planning stages, the DAC have the expertise to help develop and shape a net zero project.

10. Member Motion

Tim Pollard introduced and moved the motion -

That this Synod:

- I. recognise the great pain caused whenever an appointment is not made for a diocesan bishop,*
- II. recognise in industry and national charitable organisations, that senior director roles are sometimes not filled after the first round of interviews, and that in many parishes several rounds of interview are required before a successful appointment,*
- III. recognise the pain that must be felt in Carlisle and Ely, which after a failure to appoint a Bishop will each have to wait roughly a year before another set of interviews,*
- IV. believe that no other organisation or parish church would consider that form of delay on appointment to be acceptable,*
- V. request the Crown Nominations Commission to draft new proposals that enable more rapid return to shortlisting and interviews whenever an initial CNC process has concluded with no appointment, such proposals should limit delay for any further rounds of interviews to be no longer than two months.*

Tim Pollard explained why the motion came about; it is not saying a problem has been spotted but is a solution. It should be recognised that candidates can differ greatly from application to interview and so if an appointment is not made, a diocese should not go to the back of the queue in the appointment process. If Coventry had not appointed, under the current system the process would be delayed until 2026 or 2027. Synod are asked to support this motion to remove the delay to appointment.

Comments from diocesan synod:

- The timing in the motion may not work, two months is too short and unrealistic when busy diaries are involved.
- 6 months would be more realistic.

Amendment 1 to the motion:

Change timeframe from 2 months to 6 months

A speaker against the motion stated that 6 months was considered to be not in the spirit of saving time, leaving the time frame open to debate was suggested.

Voting on amendment:

In favour of 6 months: 35

Against: 5

Abstentions: 17

Amendment carried

Comments from diocesan synod

- This is a complex issue.
- The word pain should be replaced with disappointment.
- Ask for simplification.
- Section 4 – we cannot speak for synod, there is often a good reason not to appoint or delay.

Amendment 2 to the motion:

Change pain to disappointment.

For: 79

Against:1

Abstentions:0

Amendment carried

Amendment 3 to the motion:

Omit clause 4

Tim Pollard spoke against this amendment as it builds the argument for section 5.

For:35

Against: 15

Abstentions: 15

Amendment carried

Comments from diocesan synod

- Business needs to be correct before there can be any speeding up or simplification of the process. This cannot be reviewed in isolation; other works are needed.
- The current process is dispiriting, waiting with anticipation on the February General Synod proposal for change but this motion is fiddling with the timescale rather than the bigger change that is needed.

Tim Pollard thanked synod for their input and emphasised that this motion is to add to the discussion by General Synod.

Tim Pollard moved the amended motion:

That this Synod:

- I. recognise the great disappointment caused whenever an appointment is not made for a diocesan bishop,*
- II. recognise in industry and national charitable organisations, that senior director roles are sometimes not filled after the first round of interviews, and that in many parishes several rounds of interview are required before a successful appointment,*
- III. recognise the disappointment that must be felt in Carlisle and Ely, which after a failure to appoint a Bishop will each have to wait roughly a year before another set of interviews,*
- IV. request the Crown Nominations Commission to draft new proposals that enable more rapid return to shortlisting and interviews whenever an initial CNC process has concluded with no appointment, such proposals should limit delay for any further rounds of interviews to be no longer than six months.*

For: 35

Against: 15

Abstentions: 8

Motion carried

11. DBE and Vacancy in See elections (DS 24-23a, b)

A reminder to synod of the opportunity to join the Diocesan Board of Education or Vacancy in See Committee (nominations for both close on Tuesday 19 Nov).

12. Questions received under Standing Order 69

Two questions were received and written responses provided. No supplementary questions were asked.

13. 2025 Meeting Dates

Sat 15 March (am), Tues 8 July (eve), Sat 22 Nov (am)

Phil Swards thanked Bishop Ruth on behalf of Diocesan Synod and shared a prayer of thanks.

Bishop Ruth closed the meeting with a blessing.