

QUESTION TIME

1. *The Revd Neil Robbie (West Bromwich) has asked:*

Clergy Wellbeing. The Diocesan Website offers two forms of support to clergy who are under the CDM process. Does either form of support include advice on what to expect during the process and/or the offer of review of the process at each step, similar to the work of a shop steward in an employment case, so as to avoid the respondent being subjected to any abuse of process?

The Bishop of Stafford has replied:

On receipt of a CDM, the Bishop writes to clergyperson to inform them about the complaint and the initial stage of the process. There are then additional letters that the respondent receives from the Registrar and the Bishop which again outlines the next stage of the CDM process. In addition to this, each respondent is given the name of a suitably qualified and experienced person (usually a priest) who is available to provide confidential care and support if the respondent requires it. If the name suggested is not acceptable to the respondent, they can ask for other names. This is primarily pastoral support and not legal advice, though the person designated may have some experience of the process. In addition to this, dependent on the nature of the complaint, respondents are also advised to take independent legal advice and a list of ecclesiastical lawyers who specialise in CDM Respondent work can be obtained. There is no review of the process at each step as the Measure does not allow for this.

2. *The Revd Mark Wilson (West Bromwich) has asked:*

Over the last 6 years I have known several clergy leave the diocese because of a feeling of being undervalued. What will the diocese do to help clergy retention as well as attract new clergy?

The Bishop of Stafford has replied:

Retention is as important as recruitment, and we want this Diocese to be a place where people wish to come and serve and then stay. We value highly the ministry of all our clergy and are constantly reviewing the ways in which this can be better reflected in the support we offer. The Clergy Wellbeing page on the Diocesan website identifies some of the ways in which we express this in practical ways. We are glad to have recruited Jules Smith to develop and enhance our Continuing Ministerial Development. There, of course, is an important, an ongoing, discussion to be had about what we need to make us feel valued in our calling as ordained ministers.

3. *The Revd Nigel Irons (Leek) has asked:*

What has been the average parish vacancy rate in the Diocese for each of the years from 2010 to 2023?

The Diocesan Data Manager has replied:

Unfortunately, this is not possible as the historic information required to do this is not held, as vacancy rates are used for budgeting and therefore relevant in the current, previous and

following years only. "Snapshots" of this information have been used in the past for specific reasons when a need has arisen, but these were not retained. There has not been a use, and in turn, any reason, to track it in this format and we have therefore never done so.

4. The Revd Preb Brian Leathers (Uttoxeter) has asked:

Of churches that have seen growth in Usual Sunday Attendance of children between 2019 and 2023, please can you indicate how many are rural/urban/UPA and how many of them had total Usual Sunday Attendance in 2023 of >20 21-40 41-60 61-80 and 81+

The Mission Co-ordinator has replied:

There were 102 churches that grew in USA of children (specifically under 16s) from 2019 to 2023; 41 Rural, 45 Urban, and 16 UPA.

In terms of classifying them by size, they fell in the following size categories in Usual Sunday Attendance;

Category	0-20 USA	21-40 USA	41-60 USA	61-80 USA	81+ USA
Tally	24	36	15	9	18

5. The Revd Preb Brian Leathers (Uttoxeter) has asked:

How many churches are currently in vacancy in the diocese? How many of those vacancies have been for more than a year, for more than 2 years and for more than 3 years?

and

6. Mr Christopher Corbet (Wem and Whitchurch) has asked:

Please state the current percentage of vacancies throughout the diocese and current number of parishes in vacancy. Please state how many appointments were made to fill vacancies in parishes during each of the last 3 years.

The Diocesan Data Manager has replied:

As clergy are usually licensed to a benefice we only hold vacancies at that level not at parish or church level.

Of the 230 benefices in the diocese 56 are in vacancy (as at 2nd July 2024) giving a vacancy rate of 24.3%.

Vacant less than 1 year	31
Vacant between 1 and 2 years	15
Vacant between 2 and 3 years	5
Vacant more than 3 years	5
Total	56

Of the vacant benefices the following are subject to possible pastoral reorganisation:

Vacant less than 1 year	8
Vacant between 1 and 2 years	4
Vacant between 2 and 3 years	3
Vacant more than 3 years	2

Total	17
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The following numbers of appointments were made to fill vacancies over the last 3 years:

2021	19
2022	11
2023	24
2024 to date	10

7. Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) has asked:

Can we see a line graph of long-term trends, plotted from 2004, of Usual Sunday Attendance, Average Sunday Attendance and Worshipping Community against year, both total number and children, for each deanery in the diocese please, and an overall graph for the whole diocese? Can the trend lines be projected on to 2054, on current trajectories, and on trajectories of 10%, 50% and 100% fulfilment of the diocesan strategic vision plan, assuming that the numbers in growth apply to worshipping community, and USA and ASA are proportionate according to the most recent figures.

The Mission Co-ordinator has replied:

Firstly, I'm afraid I am unable to forecast on the likelihood of future trends, but I hope and pray they may follow recent trends since covid.

However, I can indeed provide line graphs back to 2004 where possible (not with WC as per the previous question), for the diocese as a whole, our 27 deaneries, and I hoped also helpful may be our 4 archdeaconries.

Graphs are available for each of these categories, for each of our measures of Usual Sunday Attendance, the October Count, and Worshipping Community, and for the categories of Children and Young People, Adults, and Combined.

I was loath to plot Children and Young People on the same graphs as Adults as they then became hard to see on the same scale. I'm afraid this all adds up to 288 graphs (**see appendix**).

8. Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) has asked:

Please can we have a table showing how many churches in the Diocese have had a total increase, how many have stayed the same and how many have seen a decrease in Average Sunday Attendance, Usual Sunday Attendance, and Worshipping Community, measured over the last twenty, ten and five years, and the same table for the numbers of children?

The Mission Co-ordinator has replied:

Please see the below with the clarifications that;

- I have interpreted 'Average Sunday Attendance' as the average figure we gain as part of the October Count but included additional midweek attendances but not those for specific School Services, which for consistency's sake, we have requested for less than a decade.
- Figures for changes over the period of 20 years are not available for the October Count or in Worshipping Community as they were first requested in 2004 and 2011 respectively.
- The total of 512 churches in this context is lower than our real current total due to a number of churches giving combined figures

- 'Adults' are counted as Over 16s in USA and October Count, but Over 18s in Worshipping Community

		USUAL SUNDAY ATTENDANCE			OCTOBER COUNT		WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY	
		20 years	10 years	5 years	10 years	5 years	10 years	5 years
ADULTS	No. Churches Increased	99	92	115	88	122	146	144
	No. Churches Stationary	22	23	42	10	21	18	22
	No. Churches Decreased	391	397	355	414	369	348	346
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE	No. Churches Increased	87	97	102	117	133	143	128
	No. Churches Stationary	71	100	157	81	103	77	106
	No. Churches Decreased	354	315	253	314	276	292	278
COMBINED	No. Churches Increased	92	96	116	97	120	143	139
	No. Churches Stationary	13	11	33	11	11	12	25
	No. Churches Decreased	407	405	363	404	381	357	348

9. *The Revd Paul Kingman (Stone) has asked:*

We note that the current Lichfield Diocese website is rather tricky to navigate, with broken links, poor formatting and poor search function. Do we have a Diocesan policy for keeping the website current and are there any plans for a more comprehensive update?

The Creative Media Producer has replied:

The diocesan website is indeed a repository of a large amount of information, resources, news and advice. It currently runs to over 1200 pages and 1700 files.

Each team is able to edit its own pages, with support from the communications team when requested and is encouraged to review its pages periodically.

Nearly all departments' pages are now accessible from the About Us dropdown, the exceptions being: Safeguarding which has two bold links on the home page as per House of Bishops requirements and; the Mission

(<https://www.lichfield.anglican.org/mission/>) and Vocation&Training ([/vocations-and-training](#)) depts – among the most complex and which require further simplification before they will technically fit into the About Us section.

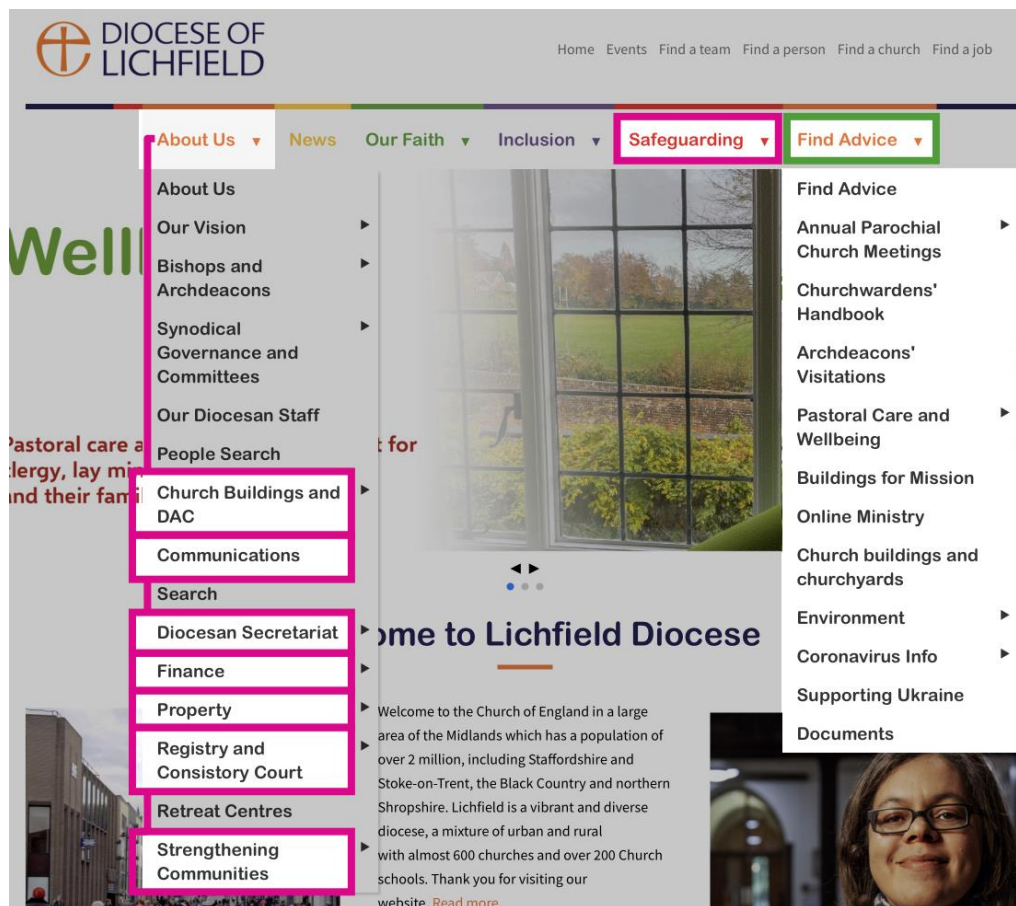
In addition we have developed the '[Find Advice](#)' section which brings together various themes and topics which have input from multiple teams.

I am always grateful to receive gracious emails or calls alerting us to broken links or poor formatting, although none have been received by me in recent weeks.

Similarly, the 'Can't find what you're looking for' link at the bottom of every page results in many opportunities for colleagues to help church leaders and the public resolve queries. Those number around ten per month, compared to the 6000 website visits (browser sessions) per month, suggesting that few users really struggle to find what they want, or they approach colleagues directly. The search function integrated in the website has improved markedly since launch.

We continue to eliminate as many Word and pdf files as possible (especially those that are little more than text with the occasional graphic) and replace them with web pages which are easier to search, display on varied devices, update and most importantly more adaptable for those with accessibility needs.

Until the communications team returns to full strength, there are no plans for a more comprehensive update, but I am confident all parts of our communication channels, resources and strategy will be given much thought over the next term and more.



10. *Mr Cyril Randles (Trysull) has asked:*

Could we have an explanation of why the diocesan accounts were not ready this year in time for the directors' meeting? Was the problem with the auditors or the diocese?

The Finance Director has replied:

The Financial Statements for the Board of Finance were ready and circulated to Bishop's Council ahead of their meeting on 21st May, where they were approved. Whilst our

preference would be the final audit clearance meeting had been held before the meeting, this was held on 5th June – there were no financial alterations. As reported to Council the only changes were odd typing errors and a couple of incidents where the year had not been updated. It was reported at Council it was subject to the final proofreading – there had already been three of them.

A copy of the Audit Finding Report is available to members if they wish a copy, it is a clean report.

As discussed at Risk and Audit earlier May the audit process for four companies, was lengthy this year, it commenced on 2nd April and took about 8 weeks, this was not in any way due to the Diocesan Staff who responded to all queries within 24 hours. The issue of the time taken has been addressed with the Auditors both at the completion meeting and by the Chair of Risk and Audit with the auditors.

For the record the initial draft was circulated before Easter and the audit commencement, they were also discussed at the Finance Committee in April where it was agreed to transfer funds from Historical Growth. We would like to put on record our gratitude to the DBF Chair, Chris Gill, Penny Allen and Lilas Rawling for their input and support through the review stage.

11. *Mr Matthew Edwards (General Synod) has asked:*

Following the approval of the Prayers of Love and Faith to be used within existing services, what provision will be made for people who wish to have the prayers but who are met with clergy who do not feel they can offer them. Might the Diocese consider compiling a list of clergy and lay ministers who are willing to offer such prayers?

The Bishop of Lichfield has replied:

Routes by which the availability of Prayer of Love & Faith as part of public services might be made known to people are currently under discussion at national level. One possibility that has been mooted is the idea of churches entering their name on some kind of public register; but this is not yet agreed. Any diocesan consideration of a list of the kind suggested in the question will need to take into account these wider discussions, which have not yet concluded.

12. *Mr Matthew Edwards (General Synod) has asked:*

A clergy well-being programme is crucial in nurturing and supporting those who are growing God's Kingdom in this Diocese. Given that this work is in many instances only possible with the help of those in licensed lay ministry, what work has been undertaken to address the well-being of Lay Ministers in this Diocese?

The Lay Ministerial Learning and Development Officer has replied:

Licensed Lay Ministers (Readers) are under the care of the Warden of Readers (Revd Harvey Gibbons). Readers should have clear working agreements with their incumbent (or Rural Dean/Churchwarden in vacancy) to set boundaries and safeguard their well being, ensuring that they are not overburdened. It is recommended that these should be reviewed annually. LLMs like clergy have access to the Listening Ear service.

13. *The Revd Dr Abbie Walsh (Lichfield) has asked:*

Lots of LGBT+ people in our Churches have experienced homophobic abuse, exclusion from full participation in Church life and leadership, and spiritual abuse - young people exploring their sexuality and identity are particularly vulnerable in this regard. Being LGBT+ is not a viewpoint or a lifestyle choice, it is a lived reality for many people in our communities. Some continue to experience this abuse and discrimination today, and these behaviours are sometimes excused on the grounds of theological conviction. While these convictions may be held with faithful intent, we are striving for a Church where viewpoints are expressed in a way that does not harm or denigrate those who differ (on both sides of the PLF debate), and particularly does not do more harm to LGBT+ people - a minority group already vulnerable to abuse and discrimination in wider society. Will any additional safeguarding arrangements be put in place to protect LGBT+ people (especially young people) in our Churches, and will there be any guidance issued regarding what language and behaviours are acceptable ways to express theological convictions regarding gender and sexuality, and what language and behaviours are homophobic and abusive?

The Bishop of Lichfield has replied:

As the question implies, a clear distinction needs to be drawn between holding theological views with conviction, on the one hand, and using abusive or belittling language or behaviour, on the other hand. This is a boundary which needs to be carefully observed by people on every side of these disputed questions, though it is probably the case that there may not be agreement as to exactly where that line is to be drawn. In matters which affect people's deeply held sense of identity and their significant relationships, it is always wrong to use belittling, damaging or derogatory language, and such situations can certainly give rise to safeguarding concerns. At present, instances or allegations of this kind are addressed through our usual safeguarding processes, whether in parishes, Fresh Expressions, chaplaincies or schools, or at diocesan level; if it becomes clear that our resources in this area are insufficient to meet the need, this is something we may need to revisit as a diocese. In the meantime, Synod is reminded of the availability of the LGBT+ Chaplaincy, which aims to be of help to people of differing theological views.

14. *Mr Phil Coleman (Tutbury) has asked:*

With the Shaping for Mission strategy revealed, what will the Diocese be doing to support the Enabling All team and support neurodivergent people and those with disabilities to become leaders within the church?

The Bishops of Lichfield and of Shrewsbury have replied:

A lot of work is being done nationally and in the Diocese by the Enabling All Team in seeking to build on the necessary and shared work of building a "Younger and more diverse Church". In addition to continuing to build a growing network of people and parishes, through the Enabling All Awards, through training and gathering to learn from those who have both the experience and passion for identifying and removing the barriers which prevent disabled and ND people from offering their gifts and thriving in their churches, there are new workstreams being developed. These are the fruit of closer partnerships with other Diocesan Officers, in consultation with Bishops, in response to particular elements of the Strategic Framework launched at Diocesan Synod earlier this year. Significant new work is being developed with others in the Diocese, which relate to the specific parts of the Framework. Some detail is offered below, but is not exhaustive.

The Diocese remains one of only a few Dioceses who fund this important work and is committed to supporting the work of Enabling All so that all God's people can be part of building church communities where all can play their part in the "Body of Christ". For more detail about the work of Enabling All please email: enabling.all@lichfield.anglican.org

Strategic Framework - Enabling All ongoing and new focus

3. Strengthen culture of vocations amongst all God's people

Lay Ministry training and Ordination and encourage vocations in all aspects of ministry, licensed or otherwise

Ongoing and new work:

- Responding to needs and opportunities for training Vocations Advisors
- Collaborating with Strategic Ministry Development Officer to ensure training is in accessible formats and venues.
- Championing the gifts of disabled and ND in ministry, including discernment about national leadership development training
- Collaboration with Diocesan colleagues to improve the accessibility of the Diocesan website
- Offering support and signposting to help disabled and ND people grow in confidence to share their gifts in new ways.

8. every worshipping community reflecting the diversity of the community they serve.

Currently, in many of our churches the whole gospel is not reaching the whole community. Parishes should identify the voices and groups in their local community not currently represented in church and shape their Mission Action plans to address this.

Ongoing and new work:

- The DAC has a new experienced member with personal insight of disability and champion accessibility as an integral part of church buildings.
- Enabling All Advisor attending Deanery Synods, alongside Strengthening Communities colleagues to share passion and resources to help parishes take steps to enable disabled and ND people to fully belong and thrive in their own contexts.
- New churches signed up to the Enabling All Awards scheme, helping them to take 3 small actions which improve the accessibility of their worshipping community.

9. all people being able to see themselves reflected in the leadership and governance of the Diocese.

The Bishop's Council will set policies which enable us to attract new members of committees and Boards, and support them to flourish in their roles, so that our representative structures reflect the diverse communities we serve

Significant new work in development:

- Working towards the appointment of those who have personal insight of disability and ND as "Participant Observers" (POs) to Committees and Boards and be part of shaping policy and practices. POs have full meeting access and participation but are not voting members. These have been shown to have significant impact in other areas of ministry in the national church.

15. Miss Alison Phillips (Newcastle) has asked:

Over the last 10 years how many: a. Lay readers b. Ordinands and c. Curates have decided to stop their training or resign and how many: a. Lay Readers b. Ordinands and c. Curates have had their training halted or ended by the Diocese? What Pastoral Care do they receive including those who receive a 'No' at BAP?

The Director of Ministry has replied:

A. Licenced Lay Readers

The number of candidates for Reader Ministry who left training is 28, primarily for changes in personal circumstances or continuing discernment of their vocation. 1 candidate has been suspended from training by the Diocese.

Readers in training have pastoral support available from their Personal Tutor, Parish Supervisor, Formation Mentor, Diocesan Chaplain to Readers in Training, TEI Chaplain, and have access to the Listening Ear Scheme.

B. Ordinands

The number of ordinands who left training is 1. 1 ordinand was withdrawn from training by the diocese.

C. Curates

The number of curates who resigned their license is 7, primarily due to personal circumstances. A curate holds his/her licence under Common Tenure (time limited for training purposes) and the removal of a curate's licence by the bishop would only be possible as a consequence of the curate being found guilty of misconduct under CDM.

Ordinands and curates have access to the wellbeing provision offered in the diocese, as well as receiving pastoral support from TEI tutors and Diocesan Officers. Candidates who receive a non-recommendation at BAP are invited to meet with BDO/ADDO and then offered to meet with a Vocations Adviser for further discernment and/or offered counselling through Listening Ear. Candidates are also signposted to other Officers who may help them to continue in discernment.

16. Miss Alison Phillips (Newcastle) has asked:

To what extent does the diocese follow each of the guidelines below, that were previously written by Rev'd Canon Dr Ian McIntosh?

- In short, this is about an openness and transparency where there will be clarity about feedback over formational development and no surprises when it comes to formally reporting to the Bishop.
- The tutor should talk to the ordinand; explain what the concern is and why it is held; explain the link between the issue and the formational criteria and be clear about what needs to change and by when. The tutor should listen carefully to any explanation the ordinand may wish to give and give them reasonable time to improve.
- The basic rule of thumb, following guidance from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, is that even if a decision is made to withdraw sponsorship from the ordinand, the student may have rights under consumer protection legislation to continue to access the course of study. This is especially the case where there is no evidence of academic failure.

- The OIA are particularly keen that such students are not financially penalized and therefore care needs to be taken to see whether a student may be able to complete their course of study as an independent student at the same TEI or at another TEI. This may mean that the Diocese commits to paying the Tuition fees for the duration of that award.
- confidentiality must be observed, and information only shared with those who need to know
- Procedural fairness is observed throughout, which includes making sure that an ordinand understands the issues that are being discussed, that clear reasons are given for decisions made; and that the process is carried out in a timely manner, usually within 90 days.
- That reasonable adjustments are made if required
- Decision making is based on professional judgement and sound evidence

The Director of Ministry has replied:

The Diocese pays due regard to the *Bishops Guidelines on Ordained Pathways in IME1* and the *Code of Conduct*, both of which can be found on the Church of England Website:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/diocesan-resources/ministry-development/formation/training-institutions>

The Diocese affirms its intention to act with openness and transparency, to maintain confidentiality as appropriate, and expects the same from TEIs that train its candidates for ordination. We seek to ensure that, should issues arise, these are dealt with in a timely manner and that ordinands are made aware of decisions that are made and the reasons behind them. Where sponsorship for ordination may be withdrawn, where practicable, the diocese would endeavour to enable the student to continue to access their course of study.

17. *The Revd Kate Watson (Wolverhampton) has asked:*

May we see a line graph of the total numbers of a) Full Time Equivalent Stipendiary clergy and b) Self Supporting Ministers in the Diocese for the last ten years?

The Diocesan Data Manager has replied:

Similarly to Question 3, the historic information required to do this is not held as there has not been a reason to retain it, other than “Snapshots” for specific reasons when a need has arisen.

18. *The Revd Tim Vasby -Burnie (Shrewsbury and Wrekin) has asked:*

Has the Diocese Board of Education looked at the Cass Review; if they have, have they made any adjustments to policies as a result? If they have not looked at the Cass Review, are there plans to do so?

The Director of Education has replied:

The Cass review has not been brought to the attention of the LDBE at this current time, because the recommendations focus on health and are not within the power of schools or the LDBE. None of the 32 recommendations of the Cass review directly apply to schools and the education sector – they apply to the NHS, clinicians and health and social care. The LDBE has not changed any policies as a result.

The prominent action so far from government focuses on interim regulations to restrict the prescription and supply of puberty suppressing hormones to under 18s in England, Wales and Scotland. This includes private providers who are banned from issuing new prescriptions. This ban runs until 3rd September 2024. Further details can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-restrictions-on-puberty-blockers#:~:text=The%20NHS%20stopped%20the%20routine,in%20line%20with%20NHS%20guidelines.>

The LDBE will await guidance from The National Church on the Cass review, which may potentially come in the expected update to Valuing All God's Children. There are no plans for the LDBE to write and issue guidance around the Cass review at this current time.

19. Mrs Josephine Locke (Newcastle) has asked:

What is the current state of the Past Cases Review for Safeguarding and work with survivors of historic abuse? And are there any actions still outstanding for the diocese to carry out?

The Head of Safeguarding has replied:

The Diocese are currently supporting a number of survivors of church based abuse identified via PCR2. We undertake such work in conjunction with partner agencies (such as Safe Spaces), a network of qualified Therapists and through in house support in other ways. The packages provided are bespoke to circumstances and the needs of each individual, hence generalisation is difficult here. More generally it is important that we address the needs of Survivors of church based abuse generally where they choose to come forward and disclose. It goes beyond PCR2 and we would encourage those who wish to come forward and are struggling to do so. This can either be done independently by contacting Safe Spaces on 0300 303 1056, or if preferred by contacting the Diocese Safeguarding team on 01543 306 030. More generally the Diocese have appointed a survivor to our independent Safeguarding Scrutiny board. There are also national networks that have fed survivor perspectives into PCR2 and other processes and have helped define national changes and recommendations.

More generally the recommendations of the PCR2 fell into two categories. The response to the National report and the response to Local report on Lichfield Diocese. Both have resulted in actions for local implementation.

In terms of local recommendations these have been largely addressed at this stage via a action plan monitored by the Independent Safeguarding Scrutiny Board. These are now largely completed. There are still national recommendations being implemented throughout the church of England that are relevant to all diocese. The primary outstanding actions nationally include –

- 1) **Implementation of a National Safeguarding database (known as NCMS).** Lichfield have now completed a process of preparing it's safeguarding records for upload to this system and are due to 'onboard' this August. At that point the Diocese will be compliant with that recommendation which requires this to be completed by the close of 2024.
- 2) **Implementation of a Regional Model of Safeguarding support.** A regional Lead for the West Midlands area (the area which Lichfield Diocese is designated), has been appointed. This will be completed by October 2024.
- 3) **Consideration be given to a independent Safeguarding Model and oversight.** This is being considered under the 'Jay' report nationally. Recommendations and models are currently under review of House of Bishops and General Synod.

- 4) **That a system of National Inspection be implemented.** The National church has agreed on an inspection framework and has appointed a company to provide for independent inspection and oversight on a three-year cycle. At the time of writing Lichfield are being advised that the date for this will be August 2025. All Diocese have scheduled dates or have already been inspected.
- 5) **That the designation 'DSA - Diocese Safeguarding Advisor' be abolished and replaced with a designation not to include the word 'Advisor'.** Lichfield Diocese are in the process of drafting new job specification which will see the DSA become the 'Diocese Safeguarding Lead'. This is intended to re-enforce the 'due regard' principle and reflect that the role is not purely an advisory function.
- 6) **That models of Clinical Supervision for Diocese Safeguarding Leads are standardised nationally.** Lichfield is aiming to be compliant with new framework by November 2024.

There are other ways in which PCR2 will impact on safeguarding arrangements for the church moving forward. The above is a summary of the main project as they stand at this time. Should anyone be interested in discussing this work further please feel free to contact me at neil.spiring@Lichfield.anglican.org.

20. *Mrs Beth Flashman (Cheadle) has asked:*

Can the Diocese confirm that those with affirming views will be heard across diocesan communication channels in the same way that those with non-affirming views are, and given the same opportunities without being censored or having comments redacted?

The Creative Media Producer has replied:

In short: Yes.

In terms of articles and output from the diocese, I would say there are at least as many articles and news stories from the diocese that are welcoming to those with 'affirming views' than 'orthodox views' – see <https://www.lichfield.anglican.org/search?search=lgbt>

In other spaces, in particular the diocesan Facebook group, we try very hard to moderate contributions with a very light touch.

The Facebook group has a clear set of rules, thanks to the ongoing refinement by Pete Bate in consultation with others.

I have noted in recent weeks a particular rise in contributions from those who are particularly strongly 'affirming' and those who are strongly 'orthodox'. Members of both factions frequently report content that they disagree with but doesn't contravene group rules; our approach is that both perspectives are honoured and authors rather than complainers are given the benefit of the doubt.

The most heavy-handed moderation carried out by the FB group admins is actually in removing posts from new and long-time members of the group advertising routine services and fetes that are not appropriate to an audience across the wide geography of the diocese; and in preventing potential spam from people who ask to join the diocese group but provide no response or no legitimate response to the membership questions.

21. Mrs Beth Flashman (Cheadle) has asked:

How does the diocese ensure that diocesan staff act and speak with integrity and neutrality when addressing issues with which they personally agree/disagree?

The Bishop of Lichfield has replied:

Diocesan staff, whether lay or ordained, are always expected to act and speak with integrity. I do not believe that it is reasonable to ask them to be neutral, particularly in contested areas where they may themselves hold strong convictions; but they are expected always to treat those who differ from them with courtesy and respect, and (where this is part of their remit) to ensure that all views are accorded a fair hearing.

22. The Revd Andy Simpson (Tutbury) has asked:

How might people report instances of homophobia or transphobia in this diocese, and what is the process in place for investigating these incidents should they ever occur?

The Bishop of Lichfield has replied:

At present, there is no dedicated route in the diocese to report instances of homophobia or transphobia. The possible establishment of such a route would have to be contingent on agreed definitions of these two terms and the practical outworking of such definitions. There is, however, an informal diocesan complaints procedure, as well as recognised formal processes for safeguarding matters and in relation to conduct unbecoming of clergy.

23. The Revd Andy Simpson (Tutbury) has asked:

What measures have been taken to record the use of Prayers of Love and Faith in this diocese, and could this data be made available publicly?

The Bishop of Lichfield has replied:

The Prayers of Love and Faith have at this stage been commended by the House of Bishops as a wide-ranging set of resources available to ministers to assist them in their pastoral care of people. This could include private and informal encounters as well as occasional use as part of already arranged services, and it is difficult to see how a record could or should be kept of such a wide range of situations. If and when the Prayers of Love & Faith are to be made available for use as so-called 'stand-alone services', it is possible that some monitoring of their use might happen at a national level; but this is not yet agreed.

24. Mr John Wardle (Shrewsbury and Wrekin) has asked:

Rule 43 of the Church Representation Rules (CRR) allows a diocesan synod to vary provisions of the CRR as regards membership. Has a Diocesan Synod approved such a scheme, and if so, could a copy of the scheme be made available on the Diocese website and by request please?

Rule 31 details several positions that gain automatic membership of the House of Clergy of Diocesan Synod. If there is a Scheme in place does this provide for automatic membership of Diocesan Synod by any roles not mentioned in the CRR. e.g. Associate Archdeacons. There is a similar provision in Rule 32 for the house of laity.

Rule 37 details several steps the diocesan synod must take before the end of the calendar year preceding an election of members to Diocesan Synod. Rule 37(5)(b) states that a diocesan synod must act so as to ensure that the number of members of the house of clergy and the number of members of the house of laity are approximately equal. What steps were taken to ensure that the membership of the two houses will be approximately equal?

The Officer for Governance and HR has replied:

To my knowledge there has not been such a scheme.

The roles given automatic membership of our Synod are as set out in Rules 31(1) and 32(1). Associate Archdeacons therefore do not have automatic membership but can be nominated by the Bishop (Rule 33(1)). If not nominated in this way, then they would be “in attendance” and would not vote (as diocesan officers are).

It is important to note that many of those whose roles include automatic membership are also elected members of the houses of clergy and laity and therefore are not additional to numbers in either house. Several such roles can also be taken up by a clergy or lay person.

As per Rule 37 Diocesan Synod agrees the basis for representation at the Autumn meeting in the year preceding an election (see DS23/11/05). The elected places available in the houses of Clergy and Laity are equal. These are of course never all filled.

As at the end of this triennium there are more lay members serving than clergy including all membership types. When the new Synod is in place, nominated and co-opted places will be reviewed and this could be a way of ensuring approximate equality of numbers, although these places are utilised to ensure a balance of gifts, skills and experience.