

Minutes of a meeting of Lichfield Diocesan Synod

1st November 2025, 9.30 am, Catalyst Building, Staffordshire University, Stoke-on-Trent

- Present:** The Bishop of Lichfield (President)
The Bishop of Stafford
The Bishop of Wolverhampton
37 clergy members
32 lay members
- In attendance:** Mrs Sam Rushton (CEO/Diocesan Secretary)
Mr Jonathan Hill (Director of Finance)
Mrs Jess Dace (Deputy to the Director of Finance)
Mr Mark Davis (Director of Education)
The Revd Simon Foster (Mission Team Leader)
The Revd Canon Nick Smeeton (Strategy Programme Director)
- Apologies:** The Bishop of Shrewsbury
The Bishop of Oswestry
19 clergy members
15 lay members

The President assumed the Chair

1. Welcome and Opening Prayers

The Revd Mick Williams, Chaplain to the University of Staffordshire, welcomed everyone and opened the meeting with worship.

The President thanked Mick on Synod's behalf for his welcome, worship and all that he did in his role at the University.

He then informed members that there were vacancies on Bishop's Council and the Vacancy in See Committee, and there would shortly be by-elections to fill these. Details would be sent out in due course. He encouraged members to consider standing or supporting others in doing so.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising (DS25/11/01)

The minutes of the meeting held on 1st July 2025 were approved and signed accordingly. No matters arising were raised.

3. Appointment of the Deputy Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance

The President informed members that he wished to nominate the Revd Preb Jim Trood to this role. An extra paper had been circulated to members regarding this. This appointment was approved by acclamation.

4. Presidential Address

Bishop Michael gave his Presidential Address, speaking about the agenda which dealt with items relating to our internal life as a diocese. He wanted to speak also about matters in the Church of England nationally, firstly the most recent mission statistics for the Church of England confirmed that the gradual upward trend in overall numbers of worshippers continued. Secondly, the very recent visit of the King to Lichfield Cathedral, where he had received a heartwarming welcome shortly after returning from Rome where he had publicly prayed with Pope Leo XIV, and in doing so had become the first British monarch to do so since the Reformation. Thirdly, the House of Bishops had met in October to discuss the Living in Love and Faith Process. As a result they had released a statement making 4 points - an affirmation that the Prayers of Love and Faith were commended for use in regularly scheduled services with same sex couples seeking

God's blessing; an agreement that use of the PLF in so-called 'bespoke' services of blessing should only be authorised through a full synodical process under Canon B2; a recognition that while further theological and legal work on clergy in same-sex marriages is explored the present guidelines should remain in place; and a conclusion that there was no need at present for further structural arrangements to be put in place to provide assurance to those with differing convictions, given that no substantial change has been agreed. He recognised that people would have different responses to this statement; and that some were feeling deeply hurt, disappointed, even angry. All voices speaking into this needed to be heard, and we needed to commit to treat one another with kindness and respect as painful debate continued around these disputed questions, which touched so closely on people's identity and core convictions. For himself, and for this diocese, he wanted to repeat what he and his episcopal colleagues said in 2018 in a letter to our clergy and lay ministers: that all people need to know and feel that they are welcomed and honoured in our churches. He hoped we could all commit to that principle. Fourthly, he spoke about the announcement that Bishop Sarah Mullally would be the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury being confirmed in her new post on 28th January next year, and enthroned in Canterbury on 25th March, the Feast of the Annunciation. He was encouraged by and hopeful about this appointment, saying that Bishop Sarah was a kind, capable and wise bishop, with a deep and strong commitment to discipleship and a proven track record of leading, and winning respect across the most complex and diverse diocese in the Church of England. [The full address can be found on the diocesan website.](#)

The Chair of the House of Clergy assumed the Chair

5. Budget 2026 (DS25/11/02)

The Chair of the Board of Finance opened this part of the meeting, saying that the budget for 2026 gave us an opportunity to begin to reshape the way we thought about our finances for the future. Some of this had been necessary because of significant changes introduced by Archbishops' Council earlier this year. These had provided the opportunity to look at how we could invest to improve life for parishes today and in the future. We were therefore going to be presenting a budget that was reworked from last year's. He and the team were grateful to all those who had taken part in the online budget consultations which had helped us in working out the priorities for parishes, which were reflected in the budget document. The key messages to emerge had been that parishes wanted investment that would help them grow and make parish life easier, such as children, young people and families, help with making churches places of welcome and mission, help churches in the most deprived continue to serve their communities, and to free up clergy and others from administrative tasks that detracted from mission and ministry. The budget being presented tried to balance the views of parishes, and was the start of change. Most of the funds given by the National Church would be set aside whilst we decided on our spending priorities, and a strong and collaborative governance structure was being put in place to support this. We believed that God would continue to provide for our needs as we continued to seek the Kingdom in His name and to His glory.

The Finance Director presented the 2026 Budget, noting that it had been rebuilt from scratch using a zero-based budgeting approach. The aim was to improve transparency, clarity, and support more effective financial decision-making. The budget had been approved by Council on 1st October. He explained that although historical data and trends had informed forecasting, the model had been reconstructed entirely, similar to the rebuild undertaken in 2022. Despite significant changes within working groups over the year, the rebuild had ultimately supported clearer decision-making.

Key National and External Factors had been incorporated, including the increase in the National Minimum Stipend and National Benchmark Stipend, adjustments to clergy pension contributions and reduced Synod Apportionment. The increased Low Income Community (LInC) funding and Time-limited national funding were also included.

While it would have been possible to use national funding to create a break-even budget, this was considered short-sighted and consultation feedback had shown strong support for using this period to invest, aligning with the Seeking the Kingdom strategy. The budget aimed to support growth, mission and ministry, rather than manage decline.

National Church income included approximately £658k LInC funding and £942k in time-limited support.

The Common Fund increase was set at 3.3% with parishes in IMD categories 1–6 receiving no increase. Transitional arrangements applied where previously agreed and Special Arrangements and mutual support would be reviewed during 2026.

Investment income had reduced due to asset sales for cashflow and weaker market performance. Work on glebe and surplus property sales aimed to build new capital for future income. Property rental income remained strong but may be affected by longer lead times arising from the upcoming Renters Bill. Common Fund remained around 60% of total income.

With regard to expenditure, he explained that Deployment included stipends, pensions, and associated costs. The Vacancy factor had been increased from 15% to 17.5% to reflect realistic averages. Stipend increases would be 4.1% in January and 6.6% in April (approx. 11.1% total).

Property expenditure included planned and eco-related works, whilst Central costs were consolidated into a single budget area for transparency. Salaries would increase by 4.1%, and the DBE grant was reduced by approximately 40%.

Operational costs included statutory/legal fees, insurance, IT, audit and governance, with 82% of total expenditure supporting parishes (64% directly and 18% indirectly). 18% supported central operations.

£943k would be placed in a new designated fund (unrestricted) with all spending to be approved via the governance structure.

A planned deficit remained, enabling strategic investment, and Resourcing the Future transitional support reduces to £0.5m over time. General reserves would fund just over £250k of the deficit (reduced from £450k in the previous year). The multi-year forecast showed a significant financial challenge but provided clarity for long-term planning.

Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) thanked the finance team for an immense amount of work in a short timescale. He said that when General Synod had considered paper GS2411 (Archbishops' Council Budget for 2026) it had in mind that some of the time limited diocesan support would cover the planned increase in stipends, smoothing in the changes over time. The fact that the diocesan budget allocated the whole of that allocation to a reserve was probably immaterial, given the considerable subsidy being offered to parishes in this budget, which for 2026 was something in the region of 5.5%. Potentially we may not be seen as one church because we were differing from the desires of Archbishops Council. He asked if this could have an impact on any future applications for funding from the Central Church.

The Finance Director did not think this was the case, as the fact that we aimed to use the £3.8m to invest and grow in a strategic manner was more likely to be seen in a positive light when we made an application.

The Chair of the Board of Finance then moved that:

The Board be authorised to expend in 2026 a sum not exceeding £17,469,752 as representing the net unrestricted expenditure for the year ending 31.12.26; of which up to £943,230 to be spent on the Seeking the Kingdom strategy programme with the approval of Bishop's Council.

The Finance Director then moved that:

The Board of Finance Budget for 2026 be received

A vote then took place on both motions which were carried with one abstention.

The Revd Preb Michael Metcalf (Chair, Diocesan Board of Education Committee) wished to clarify the statement in the budget presentation that there had been a reduction of 40% in the grant to the Board of Education. He clarified that this grant was given to the DBE to fund the Director of Education's employment, and that funding had been reduced from 100% funding to 60% funding. This reduction was around 7% of the DBE's total turnover.

6. Deanery Synod Representation for 2026 Elections (DS25/11/03)

The Chair introduced this item. A paper had been circulated setting out the proposed basis of representation for the deanery synod elections in 2026. An amendment from Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) had also been circulated in advance. He invited members to speak.

The Revd Preb Pat Hawkins (General Synod) reminded members that lay deanery synod members were the electorate for General Synod, for which quinquennial elections would be taking place in Autumn 2026. Members may wish to keep this in mind when considering deanery synod representation.

The Revd Jim Trood (Walsall) completely supported the amendment. Citing past discussions on this matter which had not been acted upon.

The Revd Tim Vasby-Burnie (Shrewsbury and Wrekin) also supported the amendment. He was concerned though that the requirement for 50 members was not realistic and this should be kept in mind when considering any new proposals.

The President expressed his regret that it seemed this matter had not been acted upon in the past.

Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) moved the amendment set out below:

This Synod:

As well as approving this formula, a detailed review of representation, examining changes to electoral rolls and to governance in parishes will be carried out in the next year, and its findings presented to Synod in November 2026. This review will also take into account the recommendations of the Church Representation Rules (CRR) 21 (1) which require that:

- *'the total number of members of any Deanery Synod in the diocese shall not be more than 150 and, so far as practicable, shall not be less than 50' and*
- *'the House of Laity is not less in number than the House of Clergy'*

This was voted upon and carried with 4 abstentions.

7. General Synod Report (DS25/11/04)

A Report by Amanda Robbie of the General Synod sessions in July had been circulated. Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) moved the following motion:

The report of the General Synod sessions in July 2025 be received.

There being no questions, this was voted upon and unanimously carried.

8. Question Time

A paper containing the twelve questions submitted with their written answers had been circulated. Several supplementary questions were raised and answered.

In respect of Question 1, Mrs Chris Gill (General Synod) said that the budget was not ultimately approved by Diocesan Synod as the reply suggested. The agenda told us that Synod received the budget and approved the amount the board is authorised to spend. The Board, as Trustees and Directors and trustees had ultimate responsibility for the finances of the charity. Whilst the Board had not taken steps to reframe the 2026 budget, given that the reply stated there would be more work done in the coming year to ensure that this support was valued by parishes and was cost effective, could the Board consider taking those steps for future years? And if not, why not?

The Diocesan Secretary said that she accepted this clarification. She added that her principle when answering the question had been that although Synod was asked to approve the total expenditure, that was made up of the many individual areas. Therefore, in receiving the budget and approving the bottom-line Synod was approving the individual areas of expenditure.

In terms of the question about reframing the budget. It was not for her to say what Bishops Council would or would not do in future. But if she were asked for advice as to when they should be thinking about the budget again, and reframing it, she would say that as the Finance Director had pointed out, the budget at the moment was framed around our Seeking the Kingdom investment in growth strategy. She would suggest to Bishop's Council that we would not look at the basis of that strategy for 3-4 years when we had worked out whether our strategy of investing and growth was working. If not, then we would need to look again at the budget in its entirety based on the strategy that we agreed as Synod. But for now, she would say we had invested, we had made a decision about Seeking the Kingdom as a strategy for growth, and we should stick with that as we see how it is manifesting itself out into the future.

In respect of Question 2, The Revd Tim Vasby-Burnie (Shrewsbury and Wrekin) was grateful for the answer given. He asked what analysis took place to see how widely central services were used by parishes.

The Diocesan Secretary said that we had begun to think about looking at our central costs, with the central senior leadership team looking at about five categories of central work. Some was statutory, or mandatory, some was essential to the smooth running of the diocese, for example the work of the finance team in making sure that stipends and salaries were paid. Then there was strategic work as we had agreed in Seeking the Kingdom and what we had heard from parishes as to what help and support they required. Over the next year we would be looking at spending some of the £943,000 put aside on providing some of that support. There were also roles that were externally funded which were also linked to the strategy. These aspects of work would be looked at very carefully, including monitoring how effectively we were responding to the desires of parishes and helping us achieve the outcomes of Seeking the Kingdom. The next item on the agenda would be talking about how we were structuring our strategy programme to have clear outcomes which would help parishes run themselves well and enabled to do the job that God had called them to do, which was reaching out in mission.

Regarding Question 3, Mrs Beryl Metcalf (Stafford) thanked the Finance Director for his answer, and asked if parishes could be advised of this, reminding them of Jesus' teaching in the Parable of the Ten Talents. It was important that parish reserves kept pace with inflation.

Regarding Question 7, The Revd Preb Brian Leathers (Uttoxeter) asked the senior leadership team whether they were considering increasing the number of part time and House for Duty opportunities.

The Bishop of Lichfield said that a variety of possibilities were looked at when filling posts and a number of factors were taken into account, including pastoral fit but also whether it was possible to fill a particular role.

Regarding Question 8, the Revd Steve Nicholson (Oswestry) asked for clarification of the answer which referred to a meeting taking place on 3rd November, but assumed work on this had been going on for some time prior to that meeting.

The Bishop of Stafford said that a great deal of work had been done, drawing attention to the relevant page on the diocesan website where there was a great deal of material and information on work that had been carried out. There was further work to be done, particularly in relation to delivering the Seeking the Kingdom strategy. The meeting on 3rd November would begin to look at this and other areas in which to move forward.

Regarding Question 11, The Revd Peter Hubbard (Shrewsbury and Wrekin) asked the Strategy Programme Director to add to the written answer that had been given in his absence.

The Strategy Programme Director said that refreshing, reviewing and revising our strategies for both lay and ordained vocations was part of Seeking the Kingdom, and he felt it was quite important, particularly when talking about multi parish benefices, to understand that lay and ordained vocations needed to be looked at quite separately as well as their interaction. A day gathering together leaders of multi parish benefices had been held around two months ago and we were working with ReSource to provide extra learning opportunities for those parishes. But over the coming months, one of the key workstreams in the strategy was to look at the patterns of ministry that we needed and to ensure that we are both helping people to discern callings to those ministries and then also resourcing them to fulfil.

9. Strategy Item (DS25/11.05)

The Strategy Programme Director introduced this item around Diocesan Investment Programme (DIP) Funding, which was available to help dioceses in their pursuit of the National Church's Vision and Strategy. There was now, for the first time, clarity on the amount of funding for which the diocese could apply. Our Strategic Framework and the Resulting Seeking the Kingdom document were designed to be "the Lichfield way" of achieving the National Church's Six Bold Outcomes. He explained that the diocese was eligible for up to £12 million in DIP funding over the next six years, however there was also substantial transitional funding and an increase in LInC funding (for our poorest communities). We needed to begin the process of thinking about what our priorities would be when applying for funding, and in groups, members were asked to consider this. Notes were made of the discussions in each group and verbal feedback was also given. Points raised included: investment in Family Workers, Schools links, administration, a skills audit of synod, working with local partners, assisting with church hall lettings, enabling churches to understand their DNA and adapt to face future challenges, central help with facilities such as toilets, and identifying needs in our communities and how we can address them, leading to growth. [A summary of the feedback can be found in the meeting papers linked from this webpage.](#)

Before closing, the President reminded members about the upcoming Selwyn Lecture on 6th November in the Cathedral, entitled “Where is Trust, Truth and Transparency”.

He then closed the meeting in prayer.

The following items were deemed to have been noted by the Synod as no member had notified the Secretary before the meeting that they wished the item to be discussed:

Bishop’s Council Reports 24th July and 1st October 2025 (BC25/11/06)

All papers and presentations are linked from the web page [here](#).