

**Minutes of a meeting of Lichfield Diocesan Synod
2nd July 2024, 6.30 pm, St John's Church, Barlaston**

Present:	The Bishop of Stafford (Acting President) The Bishop of Shrewsbury 31 clergy members 30 lay members
In attendance:	Mr Jonathan Hill (Director of Finance) Mrs Jess Dace (Deputy to the Director of Finance) Mr Mark Davis (Director of Education)
Apologies:	The Bishop of Lichfield The Bishop of Oswestry The Diocesan Secretary 12 clergy members 15 lay members

The Acting President assumed the Chair

1. Welcome and Opening Prayers

The Acting President welcomed everyone to the meeting which was the last of the current triennium. The Archdeacon of Stoke-upon-Trent led an act of opening worship.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising (DS24/07/01)

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th March 2024 were approved and signed by the President accordingly. No matters arising had been notified.

The Chair of the House of Clergy assumed the Chair

4. Update on Senior Appointments

The Bishop of Stafford gave an update on Senior Staff appointments. He was also delighted to announce the appointment of the Rt Revd Jan McFarlane as Dean of Lichfield who was present, and this was greeted with warm applause.

The new Bishop of Wolverhampton had been appointed and would be announced in due course. Work was underway on the appointments of Archdeacons of Salop and Walsall.

5. Amending Canon 43 (DS24/07/02)

The Diocesan Registrar promulgated amending Canon 43, copies of which had been circulated with amendments annotated. This had been passed by General Synod and the appropriate parliamentary processes and was noted by Diocesan Synod.

6. Presidential Address

The Acting President gave the Presidential Address. Looking forward to the item on Clergy Wellbeing he had reflected on the first two chapters of Genesis, which described what God intended for our Wellbeing. The new strategic framework that was currently being shared across the diocese was a contribution to the wellbeing of all expressions of church. He looked forward also to the financial section of the meeting, the DBF's AGM, and a motion asking for redistribution of Church Commissioners' funds. He then referred to the upcoming General Election, and the statement by church leaders of all denominations setting out their concerns for the wellbeing of those in our communities experiencing extreme poverty, the wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees, and the wellbeing of the environment. So, our wellbeing, the wellbeing of the Church of God and the

wellbeing of the world which God loved so much, he sent His only son, were cause for our prayer and action, empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, who longed for all the creation to be well and for all manner of things to be well.

The Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance assumed the Chair

7. Chairman's Comments

The Chair of the Board of Finance opened the Annual General Meeting meeting of the Diocesan Board of Finance. He thanked the Finance Director and Team for their work in finalising the 2023 Accounts, and he also thanked everyone in attendance for their part in achieving the financial results for the year. He warned though, against taking out collective eyes off the situation, as we remained vulnerable to serious problems should Common Fund collection rates not meet what was needed. He reminded members that the budget for 2024 had included the use of specific reserves, and the use of Total Return Accounting. These were limited reserves, and if used too quickly, then we could be left with very difficult choices. The Common fund remained at the heart of the diocesan message of Generous Hope, with the aim of encouraging generosity across the diocese including transitional support from the centre. However, he asked members to remind their deaneries and PCCs that we needed full Common Fund payments on time, in order to prevent us having to sell investments to support cashflow. He also strongly encouraged looking at individual giving, referring to previous discussion around, for example, regularly giving the cost of a cup of coffee, and the difference that could make to our finances.

8. Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ending 31st December 2023 (DS24/07/03)

The Finance Director presented the Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 December 2023, copies of which had been circulated. He explained that the report was produced on behalf of the Directors of the DBF (Bishop's Council) and agreed by them and was in accordance with the Charities Act and the Companies Act. The report was consolidated, and so included the accounts of St Chad's Retreat Centres and the Mercian Community Trust. Copies of the Audit Findings Report were also available for members. He sincerely thanked the DBF Chair, Mr Chris Gill, Mrs Penny Allen and Jess Dace for their invaluable support during the audit process.

The impact of the pandemic was still evident. Although Common Fund receipts had shown green shoots of recovery, receipts were 13% lower than they had been pre-covid. In the first 6 months of 2024 receipts had decreased and were about 6% lower than this time last year. However, the overall collection rate for 2023 re had been 89.26% against formula as compared to 84.76% in 2022, and the amount of transitional support had decreased significantly. Actual cash receipts had been £9.6 million (£9.4 million in 2022). These were all very positive and the results of a fantastic effort by parishes, with 387/446 paying their request in full. He expressed heartfelt gratitude to the parishes for their efforts in achieving this. Expenditure continued to rise faster than income could be generated, and fee income had also decreased. There had been an increase in investment income, partly due to the integration of DBE finances with the DBF's, and rental income had risen sharply due to the targeted utilisation of vacant properties. For the first time in some years there had been a loss on asset valuations. The overall unrestricted loss reported was around £0.75 million as compared to £1.5 million last year, however this was partly due to the introduction of Total Return Approach (TRA) and a £460k transfer from the Resourcing the Future fund. He referred members to the narrative on Page 9 of the document relating to TRA. These and other factors had decreased the overall deficit on paper, but cash flow remained the most concerning challenge. This required carefully maintaining a balance, and the aim remained to maximise income from all sources, and to minimise expenditure as much as possible.

The Revd Neil Robbie (West Bromwich) thanked the Finance Director for the clear accounts. He asked for an explanation of “Support for Ministry” in Note 13 on Page 41 of the document. The Finance Director said that this referred to items such as Central Sector ministry, administration costs and legal costs among others, which were separate from Stipends, Pensions, Archdeacons and Education.

The Finance Director then moved that:

The Summary Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Diocesan Board of Finance for the year ending 31st December 2023 be received.

A vote took place, and this was clearly carried.

9. Appointment of Auditors

The Chair moved that:

on the recommendation of the Bishop's Council, Hays McIntyre be re-appointed as Auditors until the next AGM, and that the Chairman and Secretary be authorised to determine their remuneration within the budget

Mr Roger Marsh (Penkridge) asked whether any other companies had been considered.

The Chair answered that the initial ten-year period agreed with Hays Macintyre was to end next year, and the Risk and Audit Committee would investigate a review at this point.

A vote took place, and the motion was unanimously carried.

10. National Church Financial Allocations (DS24/07/04)

The Bishop of Stafford introduced this item. A paper had been circulated which set out the case for a rebalancing of some of the funding currently held by the Church Commissioners and that held in Diocesan Stipend Funds. In 1997 pensions liabilities had been passed from the Church Commissioners to Dioceses, and in 2020 16% of their assets had been used for this purpose, as opposed to 60% in 1997. Also, since then the Commissioners had done well with investments, and the Church of England Pensions Board had also done well and was secure. On the other hand, dioceses were finding themselves increasingly struggling and had had to sell off assets to mitigate this. The motion being considered was as follows:

This Synod:

(i) calls upon the Church Commissioners and Archbishops Council to undertake everything necessary to affect 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)

(ii) calls 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.

Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) drew members' attention to paper GS Misc 1384 ([on the General Synod web page here](#)) which talked about a review of future funding arrangements. She

felt that the motion pre-empted this planned review. She also wondered if there had been feedback from the Commissioners on the motion.

Following a comment from Mr Cyril Randles (Trysull) the Bishop of Stafford moved the motion set out.

Dr Michael Davie (Oswestry) asked how much the diocese was currently paying towards the pension fund, and if the motion was successful, how much would we gain.

The Director of Finance answered that currently there was no pensions deficit, and the contribution rate was 25 % of the National Minimum Stipend. At this point it was impossible to say how much we might gain.

Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) also felt that this may be the wrong time for this to go forward partly due to the planned financial review but also the national review of church governance. He also pointed out that Church Commissioners, the Pensions Board and Archbishop's Council were separate organisations and therefore the motion did not show enough understanding of the situation.

The Chair of the DBF disagreed and felt that we should show support for other dioceses who were taking this forward. He urged members to support the motion.

The Revd Catherine McBride (Hodnet) suggested that we put forward an amended motion.

The Revd Romita Shrisunder was confused by the motion and asked for further explanation particularly regarding the reference to diocesan stipends funds. The Director of Finance explained this.

The Revd Matt Beer (General Synod) proposed that the matter be adjourned and deferred to the next meeting of Diocesan Synod with a clearer motion.

This was voted upon and carried with several abstentions.

Following a question from Preb Pat Hawkins (General Synod), it was agreed that the matter should go to Bishop's Council to look at the motion before consideration at the next meeting of Synod.

The Chair of the House of Clergy assumed the Chair

11. Clergy Wellbeing

The Bishop of Stafford gave a presentation on Clergy Wellbeing particularly reflecting on the situation now, post Brexit and post covid, with consciousness of a range of factors that had affected all. There was mounting evidence that clergy were experiencing issues increasingly reflected throughout society and the presentation set out the thinking as to how we might respond and further develop our care for the clergy. He spoke about the current wellbeing provision, ([details on the diocesan website here](#)), both preventative and reactive. It was preventative care that he wished to focus on, although he believed the reactive provision particularly the wide ranging access to the [Listening Ear counselling service](#), was also valuable. A guiding principle though, was that prevention was better than cure, and the aim was to prevent people from reaching a crisis point where possible. This would require the development of a certain culture as well as the implementation of interventions or policies. A second principle was the clergy wellbeing was the responsibility of the whole Church, and their care was the responsibility of senior staff, Rural Deans, clergy colleagues, clergy themselves, churchwardens, PCCs and congregations – the whole people of God. This was a cultural shift. With the two principles in

mind, he went on to look at some specific issues where support was in place and some possible areas for development. These included Pastoral Supervision, Continuing Ministerial Development, structural change (including, for example, governance changes), and self-care. In terms of areas for development, he mentioned curate training, involvement of family and friends and the impact of vicarage life, and Reflective Practice Groups.

Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) thanked Bishop Matthew and added that she had available a talk on this subject for deanery synods and encouraged members to contact her about this. She also said that she was a member of the General Synod Remuneration and Conditions of Service Committee, and encouraged anyone to contact her with any issues they would like raised there. Thirdly she asked senior staff to focus on developing good intentional relationships with clergy in the diocese.

Preb Pat Hawkins (General Synod) felt that the impact of Covid was still evident in terms of wellbeing. She added that there was also stress related to living in tied housing, both in terms of finance and time, particularly when approaching retirement. She asked my Reflective Practice Groups had not been as successful as hoped, but very much welcomed the support outlined.

Bishop Matthew was grateful for these comments and responded that there was work taking place regarding retirement and some further areas that he had not spoken about.

The Revd Paul Darlington (Oswestry) was grateful for the provisions but was trying to reconcile this with the sacrifice required of clergy.

Bishop Matthew answered that wellbeing was not meant to be “sanctified selfishness” but agreed that ministry was tough and demanding. Wellbeing was one way to enable people to give of their best and to flourish, so that they could be well and rooted and flourishing and in turn could exercise a more sacrificial ministry.

The Revd Simon Davis (Rugeley) was grateful for the presentation. He highlighted that Self Supporting Ministers did not always feel as supported and could be in particular need as sometimes their ministry was carried out alongside full time employment.

The Director of Ministry said that we were very mindful of Self-Supporting Ministers, who were entitled to the same grants as stipendiary clergy. Also training provision had been changed for SSM curates to increase availability. The issues faced by SSMs were very much kept in mind and she encouraged anyone to contact her regarding any concerns or improvements to provision.

The Revd Chris Routledge (Newcastle) felt that it would be helpful to encourage the newly ordained to guard personal time and create good habits from the start.

Mr John Clark (Stafford) spoke about his experience of growing up in a vicarage and some of the issues faced particularly by children of clergy, which he felt had become worse in recent years.

Dr Michael Davie (Oswestry) suggested that it might be helpful if PCCs had a greater knowledge of the amount and variety of work being done by their clergy which might enable changes to workload.

12. Question Time

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

In respect of Question 1, the Revd Neil Robbie (West Bromwich) thanked the Bishop of Stafford for his answer. He asked if the conversation around pastoral support for respondents relating to advice on how the process should be working could be continued.

Bishop Matthew understood that there could be somewhat of a “grey area” between pastoral care and legal advice which was about process. His concern was to ensure that those involved in this had appropriate knowledge and this may require training. He was, however, happy to continue the conversation on this.

In respect of Question 5, the Revd Preb Brian Leathers (Uttoxeter) asked. Given the 24.3% vacancy rate, had we identified any factors keeping people from coming to the diocese and steering them elsewhere?

The Bishop of Stafford said that this issue was not unique to our diocese and was being experienced all over the country. The number of vacancies was greater than the number of clergy available to fill them. There was awareness of the need to recruit and retain clergy which also related to the discussion earlier on relationships and wellbeing.

Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) was grateful for the information given in reply to Question 7. She felt that it might be helpful for this information to be sent to deanery synods via Rural Deans to give a picture of the situation in the diocese.

The Head of the Mission Team agreed that this was possible.

In response to Question 13, Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) was looking for clarification of the meaning of “homophobic abuse” as referred to in the question. He referred to a document called “Braver and Safer, creating spaces for learning together well” which was part of the Living in Love and Faith Learning Hub. This document included some examples of unhelpful behaviour (extract below):

A member of the group accuses another member of homophobia, transphobia, bigotry, ‘hate speech’, abuse or a transgression of safeguarding protocols, or intimidates them by their words or actions, when someone – in a tone of genuine and respectful sharing or enquiry –

- expresses their view that ‘my reading of the Bible is that same-sex activity and/or gender transition are wrong’*
- states that their understanding of Scripture is that marriage is intended to be between a man and a woman, including stating that this is the current position of the Church of England*
- asks non-personal questions about sexuality and identity*
- unintentionally uses words to describe sexuality or identity that others prefer not to use or even find offensive.*

Such contributions are not homophobic. The utmost care should be taken, therefore, not to use this term in this context: to use it in this way is a form of bullying.

He then asked whether there was any further guidance, or was this the latest clarification as to

- a) whether such contributions were to be classed as homophobic abuse or not, and
- b) whether a claim of homophobic abuse under such circumstances was still a form of bullying

Whilst not speaking for Bishop Michael, Bishop Matthew said that his written reply made it clear that it was possible to make a distinction between holding certain theological views and those views that were expressed in an abusive or belittling way. He did not think that the document referred to, which was part of a suite of resources, was a definitive statement from the Church of England on what constituted homophobia and that there was more work to be done on this.

In response to Question 14, Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) if there would be a replacement for the Revd Zoe Heming, who was leaving her role as Enabling All Officer.

The Bishop of Shrewsbury said that the Enabling All agenda, including this matter was already under discussion.

In response to Question 15, Miss Alison Phillips (Newcastle) asked for clarification of the answer given regarding the number of ordinands who left training.

The Director of Ministry confirmed the number was 2 in total, one who left and one who was withdrawn.

Miss Phillips then also asked for clarification regarding the answer given to Question 16, particularly regarding support given when sponsorship for ordination was withdrawn.

The Director of Ministry responded, referring to the answer given regarding the following of the Code of Conduct. Regarding the support given to enable a student to continue to access their course where sponsorship was withdrawn, she said that this would depend on individual circumstances, but as per the guidelines, a student would not be financially penalised.

In response to Question 17, the Revd Kate Watson (Wolverhampton) asked that, given the number of vacancies in the diocese currently, could the numbers referred to be analysed on a regular basis and presented to Synod.

Bishop Matthew suggested that Kate email Julie Jones about this.

In conclusion, A statement from Mr Ian Peake (Shrewsbury and Wrekin) as follows:

During the course of this Synod, I have been struck not only by how popular Question Time is, but also by the range of questions. Looking back, I don't think there has been an aspect of church, parish or clergy life that has not had a question of some sort asked about it.

I have to admit that there have been times when looking at the questions submitted, I have lifted my eyes heavenwards.

Yet never once have I heard the Diocesan staff ask that a question be dismissed on the grounds that the amount of time involved in finding an answer is unreasonable or the question too obscure. Instead, they regarded each and every question as important and given a full and comprehensive answer every time.

Without them, question time would not be the popular part of Synod that we all enjoy and I wish to ask if the final act of this Synod could be to propose a vote of thanks to the Diocesan staff for all their hard work over the course of the past three years.

This was greeted with warm applause.

13. Standing Committee Report (DS24/07/05)

The Revd Paul Kingman (Stone) asked for details of the proposed bid for national (SMMIB) funding for a project in Stoke-on-Trent, which had been approved in principle by Bishop's Council.

The Archdeacon of Stoke-upon-Trent explained that the aim of the proposed project was to revitalise the Anglican church in some of the poorest parts of Stoke. It consisted of two strands, both of which aligned with our new strategic goals. One strand was about developing a new

young adult focussed church with a view to it then being a resource to other churches. This would be in a parish church which currently had no congregation or worship close to the Staffordshire University campus and would work closely with the chaplaincy there. The second strand involved the development of church school partnerships in nine different locations in the city, working to plant new worshipping communities within the schools and church buildings depending on local context. The duration of the fund applied for was 7 years. There were still details to be confirmed before the bid was submitted, but there would probably be a BMO initially for the first strand with separate governance structures for the second strand which may be delegated from PCCs. Synod would be kept informed of the progress of the bid and project.

14. Farewells and Thanks

Bishop Matthew thanked all those who were not continuing to serve in the new triennium. Sincere thanks were noted for Tug Wilson in his absence, who had served as Chair of the House of Laity for sixteen years and would not be standing for re-election to that role. Special tribute was paid to John Clark (Stafford) who had been a member of Diocesan Synod since 1970 when he had been elected to the newly formed General Synod. He had also served on other bodies such as Bishop's Council and the DBE. This was greeted with warm applause.

The Bishop of Stafford closed the meeting in prayer.

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