

QUESTION TIME

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

What is the average giving per adult USA in churches across the diocese? Please give the figure for the whole diocese, a breakdown into urban, rural and UPA parishes, and the figures for each archdeaconry.

The Finance Director has replied:

The data is based on the 2022 Return of Parish Finance statistics as the 2023 has not yet been compiled by the National Church – however we work with individual parishes and can extract the required data on a case-by-case basis.

The figure for the whole Diocese in 2022 the weekly averaged planned giving per planned giver was £11.20. Lichfield Archdeaconry was £10.69, Walsall £11.37, Stoke £11.23 and Salop £11.38.

We do not have or analyse the data into the specifics of Urban, rural and UPA parishes however as mentioned we do look at parish in a case-by-case situation taking into consideration other demographic data and the wider Deanery.

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

What sum is the diocese receiving via the CEEC Ephesian Fund and what steps have been taken to ensure those funds are used in line with the charitable aims of that fund?

The Finance Director has replied:

At present we have received £175k through the CEEC – however this sum does include payments towards previous years requests - £153k are in respect of 2024 requests. These figures are to the end of October.

In the Financial Statements these receipts will appear as restricted donations and matched against costs incurred in line with the terms of the donation.

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

The annual accounts for 2023 show the cost of ‘Support for Ministry’ is £3,378,000 which is 20.15% of total diocesan expenditure for that year (p41). How is this money spent? Can a detailed breakdown of this cost, according to cost centres such as Extra Parish expenses and First Appointment Grants, Vacancy Support costs, Archdeacons, Diocesan Mission and Pastoral, and the work of DVE be provided with the source of funds for each please be provided to synod?

The Finance Director has replied:

The figure in the Financial Statements on page 41 is not solely unrestricted expenditure. It includes expenditure from Restricted Funds totalling £0.204M. (The main elements are £0.155M linked to Resourcing Ministerial Education for Ordinands, and a further £0.03M towards the Initiative Funding Project at St Chads and Marks in Wolverhampton).

Whilst there are some small areas of Designated costs, less than £10,000 in total, the remaining £3.164M is covered by 54 different cost centres, but these can be grouped in different ways. The Unrestricted total is 18.88% of Unrestricted costs.

To try and answer your question I have broken them into six different areas.

Central Admin Overheads including Contingencies	£0.857M (5.11%)
Parish Support – including Comms; Gift Aid and Parish Support	£0.391M (2.33%)
Safeguarding & associated costs	£0.199M (1.19%)
Stat & Legal (Including DAC, DMPC, Registrar & Governance)	£0.340M (2.01%)
Parochial Ministry related (Including Archdeacons etc)	£0.630M (3.78%)
DVE	£0.747M (4.46%)

All the costs are predominantly paid for via the Diocesan budget, there is the exception that the National Church contribute towards the Registrar retainer for the Bishop's Liability element of the fee, and DMPC is half funded by the Pastoral Fund due to the nature of the work.

Extra Parishes, Vacancy Support and First Appointment Grants are included in the Parochial Ministry figure and totalled £0.210M in 2023. Archdeacons totalled £0.385M, this includes stipend and expenses plus associated housing costs as well as the salaries of their office administration.

DMPC costs totalled £0.05M, however £0.025M would have been transferred from the Pastoral Fund at the end of the year, so the cost to the unrestricted fund is £0.025M.

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

The annual accounts for 2023 state the 'Real Cost of Deployment' was £63,587. How is this figure calculated?

The Finance Director has replied:

The real cost of deployment is calculated by taking the total expenditure, less qualifying income (Fees, Investment Income and Property Income less Provision for shortfall) and divided by the total number of parochial deployment (which is also the same as the total number of posts within the common fund formula). This standard cost formula was part of the Common Fund formula introduced in January 2022. A breakdown of how the cost is made up is shown on page 16 of the 2024 Budget document (DS20231102).

The difference between the real cost and net cost is that the net cost takes into consideration the transfer of reserves into the balance, so the Diocesan Subsidy given each year to parishes from historical reserves.

5. *Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) has asked:*

Please could a table and graph be produced to compare the Diocesan income from occasional offices (showing funerals and marriages separately) and Parish Share / Common Fund for each year from 2014 to 2023. If possible, could this also be compared with the total regular giving (unrestricted and restricted together) from churches across the diocese for the same years, and the total number of regular givers, both as reported in the Return of Parish Finance, where completed.

The Finance Director has replied:

The answer to the first question is no, as we do not split fee income between different categories, it is treated as a single entry by relevant Benefice. We could produce a chart that shows Fee income as a percentage of income. In 2014 it was equivalent of 5.8% of total income Common Fund was 60%. Against unrestricted income, then the figures were 6.6% and 68%. In 2023 the fees were 6% of unrestricted income and Common Fund 66.9%. It is not a large altering variance, although naturally during Covid you will get an inevitable dip.

In the second question, recently dashboards have been circulated to parishes showing their own analysis including Mission, Census and Finance data. The finance data is also available at Archdeaconry level and Diocesan level and is available in request.

6. *Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) has asked:*

In terms of Diocesan Governance and accountability, which Diocesan Body took the decision to "approve" the Stoke SMMIB bid, and where is this recorded?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

The May meeting of Bishop's Council approved the bid in principle. The last Diocesan Synod heard from the Archdeacon of Stoke. The 1st October meeting of Bishop's Council received an update and members were given an indication of costs to the Diocese. The Finance and Assets Management committee also received the budget on September 5th.

The minutes for the May meeting of Bishop's Council and the September meeting of FAM are set out in full and have been approved. No objections were articulated by any of these committees.

Bishop's Council May 2024

SMMIB Bid for Stoke

The Bishop of Stafford spoke to a previously circulated paper which set out the details of a project in Stoke-on-Trent for which it was proposed to bid for national (SMMIB) funding. The imperative to bring new life and resource had prompted the consideration of fresh ways of revitalising the Church of England in the City. The plan was to develop new work with children, young adults and families that fully aligned with our Diocesan Shaping Principles to grow younger; become more diverse, engage creatively with local communities and be intentional about evangelism and discipleship, leading to numerical growth. This would focus on a hub at All Saints' Church Joiners Square, out of which would emerge two strands: a congregation focussed on young people and young adults based at All Saints, and secondly, working with our church primary schools to create new worshipping communities across the City. The paper set out the detail of the how it was proposed the funding would be utilised, and also the contribution to be made by the diocese. This included the first year's stipend for the leader of the Joiners Square hub, £10,000 for a feasibility study on the building, the use of two existing houses, and a stipend and housing for a curate (from the existing curates' budget). There were also contributions "in kind" such as staff time. There was a full discussion with questions regarding timeframe, lessons to be learned from Telford Minster, pastoral support and relationships with existing churches. JH reiterated the importance of sustainability. A vote was held on approval in principle for the bid, and this was clearly carried.

FAM September 2024

JJ explained the bid for national (SMMIB) funding which was to be submitted soon. This was a two-fold protect around the Growing Younger agenda but was multi-generational. It involved using an existing property in Joiners Square, Hanley to establish a new church, and also working closely with local schools to create new worshipping communities. Bishop Mathew and Archdeacon Megan had worked on this locally and there had been support from DBE officers also. The cost to the DBF was expected to be the provision of two existing houses, the initial costs of a leadership post and a feasibility study. It was noted that lessons were to

be learned from the Telford Minister project in terms of the time needed for a project to become sustainable. Progression of the bid was proposed by MM and seconded by PA and was approved subject to the finalisation of the diocesan budget required.

BC update October 2024 (minutes not yet circulated)

Bishop Matthew and Archdeacon Megan gave background information on the bid for funding from SMMIB for a project in Stoke. The bid aligned closely with our strategic principles, particularly with regard to engagement with younger people, schools and new worshipping communities. This bid, for around £5.9 million, and had now been submitted. A response was expected shortly after a meeting of SMMIB on 30th October. If successful there would be an ongoing negotiation, reporting and accountability process around the use of the funds.

7. Mr Phil Coleman (Tutbury) has asked:

Incumbents appear to be experiencing delays in essential parsonage repairs. Is there a general backlog of repair tickets and, if so, how big is the challenge?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

I am unaware of any incumbent having to wait for a long period of time for essential repairs. Our reactive maintenance system is very efficient and quick.

Where they have been delays in general, has been the follow up to the 2023 QI inspections of Vicarages although I would highlight that any health and safety issue identified are always addressed using the reactive maintenance system.

We are now working hard to enumerate outstanding actions and group them into themes of work, enabling is to bring in one contractor to cover a significant number of vicarages.

Budgets are a problem This year we have overspent by £432,000 and as a result we have budgeted a 7% uplift for next year. A second major problem which has got much worse since the pandemic is finding contractors available to do works. There is a real dearth, but we are actively improving the situation over time.

We are keen to keep our housing stock to a good standard and are constantly looking at properties that may not be fit for purpose.

8. The Revd David Sims (Walsall) has asked:

One of our new diocesan goals is that, by 2030, there will be 'no fewer than 30 young people per year aged between 18 and 30 who are called to leadership being supported through a high-quality development programme offered by the Diocese. This goal is an excellent one. Currently, I've got one young person doing a once a week theology course in Birmingham, and an informal placement with us- and another looking at the New Wine Discipleship Year based in Leicester. What conversations have started about whether or not similar schemes would work here in Lichfield Diocese- or if we could partner with schemes such as these which are doing excellent work elsewhere?

The Strategy Programme Director has replied:

Thank you for this question which highlights the importance of offering a range of options and not assuming that 'one size fits all'. As our work in this area develops it is likely that signposting some of the opportunities already available locally and nationally, as well as partnering with other organisations, will play an important role. At the same time, we are looking to develop our own programme, working with the Cathedral and other churches across the diocese than can together offer a depth and breadth of theological thinking.

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

Our Finance Director often mentions that we only need to increase giving by the price of a cup of coffee per person per week. What is the average percentage of regular givers in a church against adult USA across the diocese? Is there a difference between urban, rural and UPA parishes?

The Finance Director has replied:

A slight correction in your question, I simply used the issue of a cup of coffee once a week as an example to show that small amounts accumulated makes a much larger figure. We often give something up for Lent; some of us have given up things for the full year and donated to charities. However, your question is a good one as we often look at that figure when a conversation on size of congregations or Worshipping Communities is on the agenda. Looking at the recent Mission Stats then a USA is approximately 50% of Worshipping Communities, and the number of regular givers is slightly under, but we use two thirds. Of course, not every regular giver is included in the USA data.

At present we do not sub analyse the data, but the finance department is in conversation with the Strategy Programme Director to look at all the statistics at our disposal and provide data that is believed to be the most useful in forthcoming discussions.

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

The Clergy remuneration review in 2021 stated that every diocese should have a discussion about working expenses to ensure fairer and consistent treatment in this area. Recent reports on working class clergy and clergy from UKME/GMH backgrounds have raised working expenses as an issue. Has this been discussed in our diocese since the 2021 report?

The Finance Director has replied:

Working expenses are discussed annually and at this time of year and guidance given to parishes. The one issue is of course parishes as separate charities have their own policies – however only very limited issues have arisen over the failure to reimburse correct expense claims. Whilst with Archdeacons we do try to ensure good practice and reimbursement is made correctly and in a timely manner, it is equally important that expense claims are also in compliance with the HMRC rules and regulations.

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

When was the list of Permission to Officiate (PtO's) in each deanery last reviewed on the Diocesan website and how regularly is this updated?

The Diocesan Data Manager has replied:

The list of PtOs on the diocesan website, which can be found in the Find a Person/People Search feature pulls information directly from the diocesan database and is updated in real time as changes are made in the database. All the PtO roles in the diocesan database also include the end date of the PtO as listed on the PtO and the individual will therefore disappear from the list on the website automatically when the PtO ceases. New PtOs should appear in the list within a day or two of Bishop Michael's office sending out the PtO letter.

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

Can you please tell us how the SMMIB fund award for ministry in Stoke on Trent will be used, the rationale behind it and the success criteria for the initiative?

The Archdeacon of Stoke-upon-Trent has replied:

Stoke-on-Trent is one of the 20% most deprived districts/unitary authorities in England and about 24% (12,660) children live in low-income families. Life expectancy for both men and women is lower than the England average.

The population of the city is 220,000 which makes church attendance per capita 0.5% (in 2022) or just 1 in every 200 people attending a CofE church. U16 Attendance per capita (2022) was 0.2%. Just 1 in every 500 u16s attending a CofE church.

Challengingly, our Church of England churches share in the fragility of the city. We have faithful and committed clergy and people who, week in-week out, seek to serve and love their parishes. But we are keenly aware of our weakness in the face of declining numbers and income, aging congregations which lack diversity, and crumbling buildings.

Despite faithful efforts of some congregations there are few contextually relevant worshipping communities for families, no identifiable gathered worshipping community for young adults, and very little provision for or connection with young people. As a consequence, very few young people are engaged with the church at all and local communities do not see the church as having any relevance to families and young adults.

Both the diocese and many parishes have some strong relationships with local church schools, and some non-church schools, but there are no worshipping communities specifically focussed on building on those existing relationships and supporting and encouraging faith in families who encounter Jesus in those schools.

We want to be able to respond more creatively and effectively than we do now to those in our parishes who experience poverty, conflict and isolation.

We want to support our children and young people. And we want more and more people to come to know Jesus Christ and for our churches to grow and to reflect more fully the diversity of the communities of which we are a part.

There are 2 strands to the Stoke SMMIB project:

Strand 1 - A Resourcing Church at Joiner's Square, focussed on young adults (including students) and families that will intentionally work to resource and enable the revitalization of other churches in Stoke, and develop younger leaders

Strand 2 - 9 New Worshipping Communities based on partnerships between schools and parish churches around the city.

The work is line with the 4 shaping principles of the Diocesan Strategic Framework:

1. Purposeful about evangelism and discipleship	This programme will create new worshipping communities focused on 9 church schools in the city each with congregation of c60. The revitalisation of Joiners Square will create a new congregation of 300 regular worshippers.
2. Engage creatively with local communities	Joiners Square and <i>Encounter</i> NWCs are set in areas of significant deprivation with opportunity for imaginative outreach and service. Our church schools are already deeply embedded in their communities. Joiners Square is within easy reach of Staffordshire University, two FE Colleges and the only CofE Secondary school in Stoke.
3. Become more diverse	Historically, the Church of England in Stoke on Trent has made little inroad into working class communities. This project will grow new disciples and worshipping communities in working class areas. Some of the NWCs will be set in communities where there is increasing ethnic diversity with opportunity for cross cultural mission
4. Grow younger	The primary focus of this programme is to reach families, young people and young adults through engagement with schools, colleges and the university.

The target outcomes over 7 years are:

- By 2031 there will be a sustainable worshipping community in Joiners Square of 300 across a variety of worship spaces. Reflecting the attendance pattern of the young adult demographic (1 week in 3), we anticipate this will result in an average weekly attendance of 100-130.
- At least 70 young adults will be trained in leadership from within the resource church and from other churches across the city.
- By December 2025 4 new schools-based worshipping communities
- By 2031 - a total of 9 new schools-based worshipping communities which are self-sustaining, with 225 adults and 225 children and young people.
- 27 trained key leaders of NWCs
- 45 trained young leaders

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

What is the latest overall vacancy rate for the whole diocese? What is the rate for each archdeaconry?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

I last did this analysis in October and more interviews have taken place since then

26.25 % average

Salop 30%

Lichfield 20%

Walsall 35%

Stafford 20%

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

What is the vacancy rate for urban, rural and UPA parishes?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

We do not usually calculate vacancy rates in this way but the Archdeaconry rates give us a clear steer that we are finding it frustratingly hard to fill our vacancies across all sectors.

Mitigating factors include:

Unusual spikes of people leaving for their last job

Lack of capacity to administer the process as 2 full time Archdeacons down

Parishes slow on returning profiles

No applications despite multiple ads

These factors are not listed as excuses. BSM is concerned about these rates and are all prioritising recruitment

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

(a) On the basis of what advice, what instructions, what research, what statistics, what beliefs, what preconceptions and what discussions, did you omit any or any substantial content of the First Mark of Mission or of the Biblical Gospel in DS/24/03/06. as a part of a strategy for restoring church attendance?

(b) Please give the meaning(s), content, power, and effectiveness and truth that is claimed by the Diocese to be attached to the words (i) "gospel" and (ii) "whole gospel" in DS/24/03/06.

(c) Please give any authority justifying the ascription of meaning, content, power, effectiveness and truth that is claimed to be connected with the word "Gospel" as used in DS/24/03/06?

(d) How does the strategy for growth differ from previous strategies which have been patently failing? What is the evidence behind the likely success of anything new and distinctive in the approach set out in DS/24/03/06?

The Strategy Programme Director has replied:

(a) Following the approval of the 'Shaping for Mission Strategic Framework' (DS/24/03/06) by Diocesan Synod the details of the strategy that will support us in achieving our vision and goals are being developed and will be presented to Synod in 2025. You are right to identify the importance of proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom and encouraging a widespread and deepening love for and understanding of Scripture, in all its richness and power, if we are to achieve our vision and goals. These themes will feature prominently.

(b) DS/24/03/06 uses the word(s) 'gospel' / 'whole gospel' on three occasions, one of which is in the words of a prayer. The two instances in the Strategic Framework itself are typical and appropriate uses of the word to denote the Good News of Salvation through Jesus Christ.

(c) Matthew 28:18-20 says "Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."" (NIV). This underlies our goals of growth and reaching all parts of our communities (the two goals in which the gospel is specifically referenced).

(d) As noted above DS/24/03/06 identifies our vision and goals. The strategy that will support us in achieving our vision and goals is being developed and will be presented to Synod in 2025.

16. *Mr John Tooms (Trysull) has asked:*

With regard to 'Shaping for Mission' and the other financial issues facing the CofE and the Diocese identified at this meeting - does the Diocese recognise that the current DAC set up is perhaps financially incompatible and is certainly financially restrictive in relation to the 'Shaping for Mission' proposals and the associated costs of church building projects?"

The DAC Secretary has replied:

The Lichfield Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) cares about people and places. It supports the diocesan strategic framework, in the form of Shaping for Mission and beyond, and specifically where this pertains to church buildings. Whilst the DAC is constituted as a diocesan committee, it is also a statutory body brought into existence and governed by primary legislation, set by the national Church, which requires it to operate and function in specific ways, in addition to its more local role at diocesan level. This requires the DAC to adhere to its national commitments and requirements, alongside those set by diocesan strategy and goals, and to balance these against both diocesan and parochial financial constraints.

The DAC is legally required to review and assess the degree of risk to materials, or of loss to archaeological or historic remains or records, arising from parish proposals for changes to churches and churchyards. To fulfil this requirement, the DAC must scrutinise, in very close detail, the technical aspects of proposals (including drawings and quotes), to safeguard the PCC, the church building, and the diocese. This generally places the requirement on parishes to procure commercial advice, most commonly from their quinquennial inspector (QI architect), as professional adviser to the PCC. That external party will usually charge a commercial rate (fees) for their involvement in all projects.

The high level of detail required in applications for diocesan permission, and the engagement by parishes of professionals in that process, will necessitate a cost to the PCC. However, this is equivalent to any secular planning system, or building regulation/control, where the same level of detail is required for those external permissions. In this way, the diocese is required by state legislation to operate a system of Ecclesiastical Exemption that is as robust and professional as any secular equivalency. It is not possible to spare parishes all costs in this process, without being in breach of government requirements placed on the national and local Church.

The DAC is mindful of all these factors, and gives careful consideration to all parish proposals in relation to the costs of both professional services required and the works and materials themselves. The indicative costs of works, as provided by the parishes, are included in each DAC agenda, at which meetings clergy and lay Committee members can highlight specific parish concerns and

advocate for solutions. Proposals are never considered on the assumption that parishes can pay an upper rate or fee. Parishes are invited to discuss possible external grant opportunities with diocesan staff within the DAC Office.

The DAC itself is a body of dedicated and expert volunteers, who must have due regard to the role of a church as a local centre of worship and mission, and the importance of environmental protection. In doing so, the DAC dispenses advice to PCCs at no cost – which itself is to be treasured.

17. *Dr Ros Clarke (General Synod) has asked:*

Can you confirm that the normal outcome for a member of clergy in serious breach of safeguarding protocol, including failure to report a serious case to the police, would be suspension and removal from post, especially where that person has responsibility for safeguarding?

The Head of Safeguarding has replied:

Such concerns would result in a core group being called as per policy (this is available on the Diocese Website). We would look to using CDM legislation to suspend a person under investigation for the duration of the process. This process would offer pastoral support to all parties. If the complaint were upheld after investigation, then the CDM process would trigger prohibition from ministry and that person's name being added to the Lambeth list registry. The prohibition period would be determined by the CDM process and would differ depending on the circumstances and the severity of an offence. An independent risk assessment conducted by an external assessor would be triggered at the end of any prohibition period. We can not obviously provide for details, however for confirmation there have been several cases in the last three years where this process has been utilised. This process would apply to a failure to act or report, which would be covered by the requirement under church law for clergy to show 'due regard' to safeguarding.

18. *The Revd Chris Routledge (Newcastle) has asked:*

In Question Time of the Synod of July 2024, it was reported that, as of 2nd July, 17 of the benefices currently in vacancy are subject to possible pastoral reorganisation.

- a) Is it correct to assume that 'pastoral reorganisation' will usually mean combining parishes and/or benefices into larger benefices, particularly if there is no significant improvement to the vacancy rate of 24.3%, as reported in July?
- b) What assessments have been or will be undertaken with regard to the probable impact on clergy wellbeing of being asked to take responsibility for a greater number of parishes / churches?

The Bishop of Stafford and the Diocesan Pastoral Officer have replied:

Pastoral reorganisation can include several things, it could be providing for benefices to be held in plurality, union of benefices and/or parishes, closure of parish churches, creation of new benefices/parishes, moving a parish to a different benefice, to name just a few. If you want to use an example where a union of benefices/parishes isn't applicable, there is a case where we have 1 benefice and 1 parish with 2 churches currently which we are splitting to create 2 benefices which will each have a parish, and each parish will have a church.

Clergy wellbeing is a priority for us as a diocese and whenever pastoral reorganisation is contemplated, we assess carefully as to whether new posts are “doable” in terms of workload. If the changes will affect someone already ready in post, then there will always be close consultation with the office holder.

This question draws attention to the challenges faced by shrinking resources and the need to ensure “cure of souls” when there are fewer clergy available and affordable. As part of the Strategic Framework, we are actively thinking about how we can create patterns of ministry that are healthy, missional and sustainable.

19. *The Revd Peter Hubbard (Shrewsbury and Wrekin) has asked:*

Can the diocese provide a briefing around the issues concerning the enclosure of the Glebe field at Christ Church Bayston Hill recently mentioned in a BBC report?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

The DBF have been seeking to develop its Glebe land in Bayston Hill for many years. We were part of a scheme endorsed at the time by Salop County Council, the Diocese and the local community which would have seen two bits of glebe land, one owned by the Diocese and one by the County Council, developed with new housing and community facilities. Both pieces of land were and are included in the Shropshire draft allocation. Shropshire pulled out of the deal and chose to develop their bit of the site with their in-house contractors, Cornovii. This company was not prepared to pay the DBF the land value we asked for, alleging drainage problems leaving us instead to make alternative arrangements with another housing contractor. Last year Salop asked us to withdraw our request for planning permission. No reason for this was given but we concurred with this request and decided to wait and reconsider our position. It is still the view of our Glebe agents that this land is developable, and we remain in discussion with our preferred contractor who have themselves already shown commitment in time and money spent.

In the meantime, there has been a great deal of local opposition to the development of our land as it has been used extensively by the community under a lease that expired in 2022 and they feel they have few green spaces in the vicinity, but it is for local government to manage the allocation of public spaces, not the DBF.

Following the expiry of the lease, the Diocese took legal advice from planning experts and were strongly advised to fence the land to protect its interests and be ready for a further planning application. This has recently taken place. It is not an option any of us involved with the decision-making felt positive about, knowing it would appear hostile to the community, but bearing in mind this land was passed to the Diocese under the 1976 Endowment and Glebe Measure, we have a duty under charity law to optimise our assets. Leaving the land unfenced would damage that prospect. Please note that all profits from the sale of Glebe land must be used to finance clergy stipends and the DBF are not seeking to develop for crude profit’s sake but because of our fiduciary obligations as a charity. That Measure has helped to fund the presence in every community that we still enjoy. It brings with it the tension between opposing positions which we have to negotiate. Synod will also know that Officers have been asked to do all we can to generate money from our assets, both land and property, to help with the genuine cash flow problems we face as a Diocese. We seek to find a viable way forward as soon as possible and aim to keep the parish fully abreast at every future stage.

Bishop Sarah and I met with local groups in May and they asked us to hold off with our fencing plans, We have done this over the summer and autumn months but at the last meeting of the Glebe Operations Committee we were strongly advised again we should now go ahead with the fencing

which we did 2 weeks ago. This had caused a great deal of anger in the community and has not been easy for the local parish or those of us carrying responsibility for the decision. If we could have found a way around this action we would have done so.

20. *The Revd Iain Baker (Newcastle) has asked:*

We know that the vacancy rate in the Diocese is high. Yet the Diocesan website currently has only two incumbency posts advertised. What is the strategy for advertising and filling clergy posts?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

Posts are advertised as soon as area staff have conducted the appropriate consultation meetings and parish profiles are completed. BSM consider all potential vacancies in the light of mission and financial sustainability. I would stress there is no strategy to delay filling vacancies but an ever increasing need to consider potential pastoral reorganisation and financial sustainability inevitably can delay the process.

Some posts are not on the website because they are going through the interview process. Others are waiting to be readvertised. I will give some thought to how we publicise our progress against the vacancies.

21. *The Revd Emmanuel Salako (Wulfrun) has asked:*

I was wondering about the fees for occasional service cover. What are the current rates, and when were they last reviewed in the diocese?

The Finance Director has replied:

The current figure is £62 and will increase to £64 from January 2025, representing 50% of the statutory funeral figure. That is the current policy used by the Diocese however it is reviewed annually and ironically was part of the Finance Committee Agenda earlier in the month. The fee is only payable to those meeting the criteria unless there is an agreement in place. There is an Annual Ministerial Code of Practice that covers this area, the 2025 version is currently being updated.

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

One of our strategic goals is “all people being able to see themselves reflected in the leadership and governance of the Diocese”. Is any diversity data currently collected for any of our governance structures (e.g. Diocesan Synod, Bishops Council, DBE, Deanery Synods, etc), or ordained and lay leadership posts, for example according to protected characteristics (including age, gender, gender identity, marital status, disability, race, sexual orientation)? What data can be regularly provided to synod to monitor and evaluate progress towards this goal?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

Jo has already sent out a monitoring form to the new Synod at the beginning of the triennium. The results have enabled +Michael to address the issue of diversity in his nominations to Synod and Council. The DBE did the same thing at the same time.

Responses were disappointingly low and I would urge Synod members to revisit that questionnaire and return to St Mary’s House.

Evaluation of progress can only be done at the beginning of the Synodical cycle. Changes to governance committees are generally very small during the period of office.

23. *Mrs Josephine Locke (Newcastle) has asked:*

The Appointments and Departures page on the Diocesan website indicates that 16 curates and incumbents have left the diocese for posts elsewhere since June 2024.

How are exit interviews conducted for departing incumbents and curates who leave the diocese and have these interviews generated any lessons for the diocese to learn about the retention of clergy?

The Archdeacon of Stoke-upon-Trent has replied:

The system for exit interviews varies slightly between the episcopal areas, but all undertake them for incumbents.

In the last 3 years I have done 20 exit incumbent interviews in the Stoke Archdeaconry. 11 clergy were retiring, 4 moving for family reasons, and 1 moved to another parish within the diocese. Of the other 3, 1 moved largely due to difficult parish issues which we are continuing to address, 1 moved to chaplaincy ministry, and the other left Church of England ministry due to theological differences. The exit interviews have generated extremely helpful information for supporting parishes in vacancy but no themes about retention.

I don't do formal exit interviews with curates. The Bishops Staff Team and Ministry Department are actively working on ways to try to improve curate retention.

The Archdeacon of Lichfield has added:

Most of mine have been retirement exit interviews – people who have moved within the Diocese or nearer to family.

I've had conversations with curates - family being the key factor alongside church tradition, either when looking in the Diocese, or looking outside.

One conversation with a curate struck me that those who began around Covid weren't able to become part of the community in the usual way, which has highlighted the need to be close to family for their first incumbency for support beyond those in the parish, as well as being able to spend time together. Aging parents is another aspect for clergy when looking to move.