

Diocesan Synod – 1st November 2025
Bishop's Council Report

24th July 2025

- An act of opening worship was led by the Revd Ben Whitmore.
- Bishop Michael welcomed everyone and particularly the Revd Dave Poultney who was with us on placement from the Diocese of Coventry. He then thanked the Revd James Gandon on this his last meeting before leaving the Diocese. James in turn thanked members and was appreciative of his time in the diocese and the opportunities it had brought.
- The minutes of the meeting on 27th May were approved. The Finance Director confirmed that the Report and Financial Statements were due to be signed in week beginning 28th July on the return of the audit partner.
- The Diocesan Secretary gave a presentation on moving towards a framework for managing and delivering strategic change. There was much work to do to organise ourselves in order to deliver our “Seeking the Kingdom” strategy. Firstly, some principles of good organisation and governance, looking at purposes for which groups might meet and how that translated into our context with our existing committees and some additional ones. This included Bishop's Council also acting as a Programme Board, with additional alternate meetings. She also emphasised key workstreams including Telford Minister, the Joiners Square project in Stoke and a potential project in Wolverhampton. There were also several other project boards that would fall under the oversight of Nick Smeeton. In order to ensure direction, risk management and information we also needed a People Plan, a Finance Plan, Communication and Stakeholder Engagement and a piece of work on Shaping the Culture. Sam explained how the different areas would be accountable to Council/Programme Board. We would also need to look at our current governance and its integration into the strategy, and also how clarity around the roles of the various bodies could be improved. Council approved the framework in principle, subject to more detail being brought to a future meeting.
- The Deputy Chair of the Board of Finance introduced the Finance Section of the meeting, explaining that the upcoming finance report was in a new format, the aim of which was to be more informative, succinct and digestible. It also aimed to help us monitor, control and scrutinise and more easily identify any areas of concern.
- The Finance Director spoke to the previously circulated Finance Report and explained its format. Looking at the data, income was a matter for concern, although Common Fund receipts had improved on last year for 5 of 6 months. Investment income had been lower than expected, however shares had been sold in 2023 and 2024 to aid cashflow and new capital to invest had not materialised. Work to address the reasons for the fall in investment income was ongoing, with house sales at the beginning of this year and work on Glebe developments was also taking place.
- The Finance Director spoke to a previously circulated paper setting out initial assumptions on which the 2026 budget would be built. One of the main questions was regarding the stipend increase, which it was suggested would take place in two stages in January and April, and in turn salary increases.
- Meeting as the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, members noted a Schemes and Orders Update, and a Suspensions and Restrictions update.

1st October 2025

- An act of opening worship was led by the Revd Simon Foster
- Bishop Michael welcomed everyone, particularly Liz Jermy, the Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Scrutiny Panel.
- The Minutes of the meeting on 24th July 2025 were approved.
- A proposal that members of Bishop's Council should have DBS checks and complete Safeguarding Training was approved.
- The Diocesan Secretary's work on the Strategy Framework was ongoing, and she would report further at the next meeting.
- The Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Scrutiny Panel spoke to her three-year report on the Panel's work. The detail of this was much appreciated by members.
- The Past Cases Review 2 (PCR 2) Action Plan had been circulated and had been updated with ongoing actions as appropriate. This was voted upon and signed off.
- The constitution of the proposed Diocesan Safeguarding Operational Group was voted upon and approved.
- A proposal for the secondment of the HR Director from Birmingham Diocese for a period of eighteen months was voted upon and approved. This was for three days per week to support our HR provision.
- The Strategy Programme Director gave a verbal update. He spoke about the Project Boards that would sit beneath Council as the Strategy Programme Board, being Feeding our Faith, Supporting our Ministry and Building up our Parishes and Communities (aligned with Seeking the Kingdom). These would be chaired by +Tim, +Sarah and +Matthew respectively. These boards would meet termly starting in early 2026. In order to ensure a good mixture of skills and experience, the members of these would be appointed and he asked Council members to consider serving and to contact him if they wished to do so.
- Bishop Michael spoke about the Chairmanship of the Diocesan Board of Education. The Revd Preb Michael Metcalf had served on Bishop Michael's behalf in this role for around the last five years and although not wishing to end this abruptly, he was looking towards a time when a new Chair would be appointed. Bishop Michael expressed his grateful thanks to Michael for all he had done and continued to do as Chair. He informed Council that he had invited Bishop Matthew to take on the role in due course.
- Bishop Michael informed members that following the resignation of the Revd Preb Terry Bloor as Deputy Chair of the DBF, he wished to nominate the Revd Jim Trood to fill this vacancy. A proposal that Jim be co-opted onto Bishop's Council was voted upon and approved.
- The Chair of the DBF introduced the Finance Section of the meeting, firstly with minutes of the meeting FAM in July and September. These were noted with no questions.

- The Finance Report to June had been circulated to members and the Finance Director pointed out that the August report was now ready. At that point the report showed a surplus, purely because of a large legacy that had been received at the end of the month. He also noted that in September, Common Fund receipts had been £816,000, which was £32,000 up on the same month last year and marked the eighth of nine months in which receipts had been higher than a year ago. This was significant and he thanked Jess Dace and Karen Brook for their work and the parishes for their efforts in achieving this. Overall receipts were up around 4% and this was significant particularly when looking at the budget for 2026. He also noted that there had been two more house sales and one purchase between June and August, and Cashflow was around £2.8 million at the end of August. One area that was disappointing was investment income, however this was the impact of sales of shares in 2023 and 24. Work was ongoing to redress this, along with property expenditure and issues caused by the Renters Bill.
- Members had received a digest of feedback from the three Area budget consultations that had taken place in September. Sam Rushton spoke how the common theme from parishes was that they wanted us to balance holding down the Common Fund request with investing in activities that would help them to be more missional on the ground. This was reflected in the upcoming budget, and the work done on this had been affirmed by the feedback received. Sam also commented that feedback had been broadly similar across the three Areas.
- The Finance Director presented the Budget for 2026. After questions this was voted upon and unanimously approved.
- Meeting as the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, members noted a Schemes and Orders Update, and a Suspensions and Restrictions update.
- A proposal in respect of Stoke-upon-Trent and Fenton to create a new parish from the existing parish was approved.
- Following a vote by elected Lay members, Stephen Vince was elected to the Diocesan Patronage Board.

JD October 2025