

THE BISHOP'S COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 26 MARCH 2025 AT ETHELDREDA HOUSE
AND BY ZOOM

Present: The Bishop of Huntingdon (Chair), Canon Tim Walters (Chair), Revd Natalie Andrews, Revd Canon James Blandford-Baker, Very Revd Mark Bonney, Canon Dr Felicity Cooke, Revd Dr Beth Cope, Miss Lindsay Davies, Revd Danny Driver, Revd Canon Becky Dyball, Mr Christopher Falvey, Revd Canon Sarah Gower, Ven Richard Harlow, Revd Canon Philip Howson, Ven Dr Alex Hughes, Canon Simon Kershaw, Revd Canon Rob Mackley, Mr John Pigott, Mrs Sarah Robinson, Mr Jon Smith, Canon Lizzie Taylor, Mr Christopher Townsend, Mrs Felicity Watson. By Zoom: Canon Janet Perrett, Mrs Elaine Levitt, Mr George Lynn.

In attendance: Mr Jon Green - Interim Diocesan Secretary, Revd Iain Osborne - Bishop's Chaplain and Director of Strategy, Revd Peter Leech - Director of Mission and Ministry, Mr Jon Young - Diocesan Director of Education, Mrs Philippa Pearson - Clerk.

The Bishop of Huntingdon and Acting Bishop of Ely welcomed members, and the meeting opened with Dwelling in the Word from Revd Dr Beth Cope.

1. **Apologies** were received from Canon Francis Burkitt, Dr Jonathan Chaplin.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

None were received for this meeting.

3. **Minutes of the Bishop's Council meetings held on 30 January 2025**

3.1 Approval:

The minutes were unanimously **APPROVED**, subject to the following amendment to Item 4.2, National Safeguarding Update, page 2, final paragraph. The second sentence should now read: *Mr Chapman confirmed that the team are providing excellent safeguarding delivery, safely and to national guidelines which are compliant with charitable and statutory responsibilities, yet he acknowledged risk and a need to monitor.*

3.2 **Matters Arising:**

Mr Christopher Townsend asked if the minutes of the Finance Committee on 23 January 2025 could be circulated, and this will be done together with the minutes from the Committee's meeting on 13 March.

ACTION: JG

4. **Safeguarding**

A report prepared by Lisa Pearson, Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, was circulated before the meeting.

Bishop Dagmar advised that interviews for a new Head of Safeguarding would take place on 28 March 2025 and there are four candidates for the post. It was noted that Mr Jonathan Chapman, Independent Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel, will resign from this post once a new Independent Chair is in place, and he will support the diocese with the recruitment of the new Head of Safeguarding in the meantime.

Questions:

Mr Simon Kershaw asked if the Independent Chair of DSAP is a fixed-term appointment. Bishop Dagmar advised that it is, and together with the Interim Diocesan Secretary options for possible collaboration with other regional dioceses are being considered. There is a drive towards standardisation and there will be a proper process in place for this potential project.

5. **Council Membership and Operations**

5.1 **Conflicts of interest policy**

This paper was not available for the meeting and will be circulated to members afterwards.

ACTION: JG

5.2 Elections update

The Interim Diocesan Secretary advised that the Vacancy-in-See Committee has had three nominations:

Revd Simon Scott- House of Clergy

Mrs Kim Sewell - House of Laity

Dr Frances Young - House of Laity

This would take the membership of the Committee above the minimum requirement of 21 members, and Mr Green recommended that all three nominations be accepted.

MOTION: To accept Revd Scott, Mrs Sewell and Dr Young to the Vacancy-in-See Committee.

APPROVED: UNANIMOUSLY

ABSTENTIONS: None

The Very Revd Mark Bonney advised that the Committee should meet soon to establish a new Chair.

ACTION: JG

5.3 How the Council expect oversight and assurance to work

Revd Iain Osborne advised that in the previous triennium Council had worked to strengthen the assurance reporting it received and make it more systematic. The Trustee Assurance Group (TAG) was therefore created to report directly to Council on the effectiveness and efficiency of EDBF's work to deliver its strategy. The TAG in 2024 produced a baseline report, and the new membership now needs to establish a programme for regular updates. The work of TAG and the Audit Committee overlap, insofar as both deal with risk. Oversight of risk remains a weakness for EDBF, and the Audit Committee has not met sufficiently often recently. Once both Audit and TAG are running well (perhaps in about a year's time), consideration should be given to whether the two committees could be combined.

Mr George Lynn, Chair of the Audit Committee, the Interim Diocesan Secretary and Mr Jon Smith are in discussion about strengthening audit and risk management and will report back.

ACTION: GL/JG/JS

5.4 Membership of Committees

Paper 5.1 was distributed before the meeting outlining roles that should be filled.

One innovation here is to create 'lead members', including for the Mission and Ministry Team who have one of the widest remits. The aim of lead members is to ensure someone on Council has deeper knowledge of work and issues and can advise the Council as a whole on decisions, as an alternative to creating more formal committees.

Questions:

Revd James Blandford-Baker asked, what are our real priorities and should we focus on creating committees or lead memberships on these priorities. He asked how many committees are there overall.

Revd Osborne advised that there are 18 committees, and role descriptions need to be done for all. A number are statutory requirements, while others respond to perceived needs. There may be scope to prioritise, including whether we use the lighter-touch 'lead member' approach rather than a committee, and the process of producing role descriptions might help to clarify the best approach. Mr Green advised that the general aim is to enable members, as Trustees, to become more connected with the work of the Diocese.

Mr Christopher Townsend asked if TAG could report on whether we have sufficient capacity and capability to pursue projects, to support a prioritisation discussion.

Mr Jon Smith asked if EDBF creates planning documents that cascade overall objectives into departmental goals.

Bishop Dagmar advised that there are priority actions at any given time, but a large proportion of resource is devoted to routine work alongside of the priorities. Canon Tim Walters confirmed that Heads of Departments (HODs) meet weekly to discuss what their departments are doing and current intended outcomes.

Council members were requested to liaise with Revd Osborne and Mr Green individually, regarding their interests in committee participation and to offer assistance where needed.

ACTION: COUNCIL MEMBERS

The Ven Richard Harlow asked if the September TAG report could be circulated to members.

ACTION: JG

6. Mission Priorities Plan

Revd Iain Osborne and Revd Peter Leech.

A slide presentation was shown at the meeting with printed copies available.

Following on from Bishop Dagmar's presentation at Bishop's Council on 30 January 2025 where she spoke about mission priorities together with consultation at Diocesan Synod on 08 March and with Rural Deans, a request for mandate was put to Council to enable a business plan to progress work on the top 10 mission priorities.

Feedback from Diocesan Synod focused on new buildings and communities, children, young people and families whilst the financing of this work required more information. Rural Deans focused on the same aspects as well as a need for paid administration in order to release clergy for mission and ministry.

The three overall priorities are identified as:

- New worshipping communities in new-build developments
- Children, young people, families
- Preparing for the next stage (help with parish administration, reviewing HR and Comms, etc.)

Challenges to consider include:

- Taking opportunities early on in new housing area
- Developing a framework for how new ministers and laity can work with other ecumenical partners and parishes
- Funding for additional curates

On the third priority, much work is already underway using existing resources. A centrally employed deanery administration team could help and advise parishes. There could be DIP funding from Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) for additional curates and some funding from Church Commissioners for deanery administrators. Funding the way forward for all priorities would take a five-year investment of £3.3M, some of which should be considered from investment reserves rather than annual running costs.

Canon Walters advised that this is a complex and detailed plan, especially as the Diocese is running a significant deficit with -£360,000 forecast for 2025. Further discussions are needed going forward to see what can be achieved, what the outcomes will be, and a business plan required.

Questions:

Revd Canon Philip Howson noted that facilitator observation is needed as some parish systems can impede mission and ministry work. More clergy resources are needed to consider a different approach, and this could be challenging within the clergy role.

Revd Natalie Andrews asked if new housing is just in Cambridge Archdeaconry or Huntingdon and Wisbech as well. Concentration should be on new curates and not volunteers. How are administration places allocated, how are projects supported and evaluated.

Mr John Pigott advised he was supportive of having administrators as this comes up in deanery planning. Is leadership missing? People are not just congregation members but also do other things in parishes.

Mr Christopher Townsend noted that new housing projects can take longer than anticipated to finish and we should consider plans for the next five years.

Revd Osborne and Revd Leech will return with the answers to the questions. **ACTION: IO/PL**

MOTION: To proceed with preparing a business plan for Mission and Ministry Priorities.
APPROVED: UNANIMOUSLY **ABSTENTIONS: None**

7. Bishop's Business

The Charity Commission wrote to all Bishops in January 2025 in the wake of the Makin Report, requesting further information on safeguarding duties and responsibilities and confirmation whether there is conflict or anything that would prevent fulfilment from trustees of safeguarding duties. The letter and a response from Bishop Dagmar and the Chair of EDBF, Canon Tim Walters was distributed to members before the meeting. It was noted that the legal advice of the Registrar had been taken on preparing the letter and that DSAP Chair and the Diocesan Safeguarding Team had been consulted.

The response will be amended following input from members and the final version circulated before sending to the Charity Commission. **ACTION: +D/JG**

Questions and feedback:

The Ven Richard Harlow asked if we have confidence that we have the tools in place for Code of Behaviour sanctions.

Mr Jon Green advised that a significant number of enquiries are received by the diocesan safeguarding team, which ultimately prove not to be safeguarding matters. All enquiries are dealt with in the first instance by the team.

Canon Dr Felicity Cooke noted that there are no clear boundaries on the general understanding between safeguarding and different behaviour patterns. There is confidence at parish level on safeguarding training.

Revd Canon James Blandford-Baker asked if we know if safeguarding training is producing a good end result.

MOTION: For Council Members to approve the response letter to the Charity Commission, subject to changes discussed.

APPROVED: UNANIMOUSLY **ABSTENTIONS: None**

8. Education Update and OFSTED Tracker

Mr Jon Young, Diocesan Director of Education.

A report and OFSTED Tracker information was circulated before the meeting.

Mr Young commended his team and the schools in the Diocese and that he felt supported and challenged by EDEC, led by Ven Dr Alex Hughes. He noted that it is good how education is integrated into diocesan business rather than being an outpost or afterthought. In addition, two MATs are going very well with DEMAT having lots of experience and ACT got off to a good start. Some of the national government impetus to academise has been withdrawn and other options should be considered, including federations, partnership agreements, and clusters.

Mr Young outlined three challenges and opportunities facing schools in the Diocese.

1. Pupil Numbers

These average at 183 with many but not all schools suffering from a falling roll. National statistics show that nursery and primary schools peaked in 2019, and figures have been gradually falling since then due to a reduction in birth numbers. The Pandemic saw a larger drop in population in 2021, the birth year which affects Reception now, and between 2025 and 2028, national primary numbers will fall from 4.6m to 4.3m. The peak in the secondary school population is projected to be in 2026 and 2027. Regional demographics stem from changes in how schools were originally set up which were to serve the poor, often in rural areas which now are affluent, and housing is unaffordable for many families. Some schools here have difficult decisions to make around merging classes whilst others have challenges in resources.

Opportunities are in growth areas such as Great Haddon, near Peterborough with three to four primary schools and a new secondary school being considered.

2. SEND, SEMH, EAL

There is a national increase in children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and those with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs (SEMH) as well as increasing demands in some schools with significant migrant populations, for example in Peterborough, who bring their own language and cultural contexts. The Diocesan schools are very good at including and integrating pupils, adding to the richness and diversity of the educational experience, but some children would be better served in special schools or alternative providers, and the county council has little spare capacity. The effect of this on staff and other pupils can be significant.

Opportunities are more provision for children with these needs and some schools have capacity to do this. Sutton Primary is doing this well with several schools interested in their work.

Ely church schools are actively engaged in helping to improve the lives of children, not just through academic outcomes but by nurturing them as emotional, physical and spiritual members of God's family. Elsewhere, School Chaplains across the Diocese are engaging with the families and communities they serve and building the kinds of connections that can sustain young people in the settings they belong to.

3. Finance

Falling rolls and children with additional needs put a lot of pressure on school resources. Rising energy prices and school transport costs add to this, as do unexpected problems that arise. Schools are having to cut back on things such as trips to the Cathedral, music provision, sports equipment, library books because they just can't afford them.

Whilst financial pressures are ongoing, many schools benefit from being part of the community and working with their local church. By developing those links, opportunities come forward such as Tesco giving free food and drink for events, parents volunteering to help with projects, and members of the church community regularly leading collective worship and reading with the children. The Parish School Covenant is an important device to bring school and church together to discern the best ways to mutually support each other, and Mr Young is keen to support this.

Another aspect for schools to consider is combining with others into larger groups of schools offering stability and economies of scale. This may enable some cost saving measures, such as sharing of back-office functions, collective purchasing of learning resources or school lunches.

Questions and feedback:

Revd Danny Driver asked what percentage of children are in DEMAT and how does this compare to the local authority, Mr Young advised that numbers are high compared to the national figures at 5%.

Canon Lizzie Taylor asked what the Diocesan trend in the drop in population is compared to the national one. Mr Young will return with the answer. **ACTION: JY**

Canon Dr Felicity Cooke thanked Mr Young for his presentation and that it is good to hear about the schools and the scale of work.

Bishop Dagmar thanked Mr Young for his work and that he can be contacted with any questions at jon.young@elydiocese.org

9. Accounts for Q4 2024

Canon Tim Walters.

Draft accounts were circulated before the meeting.

Canon Walters reported that whilst there has been further ministry share payments received since the accounts were circulated, the finance team are investigating why payments are 20% behind 2023 share payments. Other aspects to note:

- Ephesians Fund is paid up to ministry share rate
- Struggling parishes are being supported at deanery level
- Investment income is down as some property sales didn't happen, a portfolio was moved to an initial low yield fund and global markets have not been as stable

- Other income such as curate grants are down
- There is an increase in utilities and insurance costs for clergy
- Other overheads in general have increased including insurance and business rates whilst electricity costs are higher than budgeted as the solar panels on Etheldreda House were not operational until summer 2024

The current deficit for 2025 is forecast as -£360,000 and Canon Walters advised that income is being managed as best as possible to facilitate growth. He also advised that various discussions were taking place on land developments, some of which are progressing but not finalised. Any funds from these projects will take a few years to complete and become available. The Assets Sub-Committee are looking at glebe and investments income.

Question:

Canon Janet Perret noted that many parishes have drawn on resources and what is the strategy for those that do not have further reserves. Canon Walters advised that he is aware of this and is speaking to deaneries. The Central Church has information to help with deanery share.

10. Annual report of the Houses Committee

Mr Jon Green, Interim Diocesan Secretary.

The work of this important committee was commended to Council as housing is very important to the Diocese. Mr Green advised that housing stock is now better managed and maintained and there is a move away from older housing to newer stock. Of 150 properties, 120 are occupied by clergy and the rest provide a sustainable rental income. The £1.2M budget is split 50-50 between the payment of statutory charges arising from clergy occupancy (Council Tax, Buildings Insurance and Water Charges) with the remainder for maintenance. Where possible, when not required for occupation by clergy, houses were rented out on short term tenancies. This provided a valuable income and also meant the fabric of the house was better protected from continual use. Members noted a Renters' Rights Bill is due to pass through parliament in 2025 which may affect rental terms and income.

Questions and feedback:

Revd Canon James Blandford-Baker noted that housing is better than most other dioceses and this is important as a contribution to clergy well-being and to feel valued.

Revd Canon Becky Dyball, Joint Chair of the Houses Committee advised that more members would be welcome on this Committee, including curates.

Bishop Dagmar thanked, on behalf of Council, Mrs Stella Green, Property Manager for her work on housing.

11. Business of Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee

11.1 Minutes of Huntingdon and Wisbech ADMPC 17 February 2025, and Cambridge ADMPC 24 February 2025

No questions were raised.

11.2 Creation of Northstowe parish

The Archdeacon of Cambridge, Ven Dr Alex Hughes advised that informal consultations were in progress with various interested parties for a new parish of Northstowe. The project has been brought forward earlier than planned as there is an opportunity to bid for land to construct a community building, including space to worship. There is strong support for this locally and a Draft Pastoral Scheme will be drawn up after Easter to bring to ADMPC for recommendation to approve at DMPC. Council raised no objections to creating a new parish.

MOTION: To create a Draft Pastoral Scheme to create the new parish of Northstowe.

APPROVED: UNANIMOUSLY

ABSTENTIONS: None

Bishop Dagmar gave thanks to Revd Dr Beth Cope for her work in Northstowe and as Bishop's Advisor for New Housing.

12. Deemed Business

The following meeting minutes circulated under deemed business were taken as read:

- DAC 16 January 2025
- Diocesan Environment Task Group 10 February 2025
- Church Uses Committee 06 February 2025
- Changing Market Towns Project Board 09 December 2024

13. Any Other Business

None was raised.

The meeting finished at 21:17 prayers and the blessing by Bishop Dagmar

Dates of next meetings (all at Etheldreda House)

- Saturday 17 May all day, 9.30am-3.30pm (meeting as Bishop's Council)
- Thursday 17 July at 6.45pm (meeting as EDBF)
- Thursday 25 September at 6.45pm (meeting as Bishop's Council)
- Wednesday 26 November at 6.45pm (meeting as EDBF)
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Signed:

Date:

Bishop's 26 March 2025
DRAFT V4 17 April 2025

SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS		
ITEM	ACTION	BY WHO
3.2	Distribution of Finance January March Finance Committee minutes to members	JG
5.1	Distribution of Conflicts of Interest Policy to members	JG
5.2	Convene meeting of Vacancy-in-See Committee to appoint new Chair	JG
5.3	Repost back to members on strengthening audit and risk management discussed by GL/JG/JS	JG
5.4	Committee participation by members	All members
	September TAG report circulated to members	JG
6	Report back on questions raised on Mission and Ministry priorities	IO/PL
7	Charity Commission letter updated, and final version sent to members	+D/JG
8	Report back on questions raised on Education	JY