

THE BISHOP'S COUNCIL**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 17 JULY 2025
AT ETHELDREDA HOUSE AND BY ZOOM**

PRESENT: The Bishop of Huntingdon and Acting Bishop of Ely (Chair), Revd Canon James Blandford-Baker, Dr Jonathan Chaplin, Revd Dr Beth Cope, Revd Danny Driver, Miss Lindsay Davies, Revd Canon Becky Dyball, Mr Christopher Falvey, Revd Canon Sarah Gower, The Ven Richard Harlow, The Ven Dr Alex Hughes, Revd Canon Philip Howson, Canon Simon Kershaw, Mrs Elaine Levitt, Canon Janet Perrett, Mr John Pigott, Mr Jon Smith.

By Zoom: Canon Dr Felicity Cooke, Mr George Lynn, Canon Lizzie Taylor.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Jon Green - Acting Diocesan Secretary, Mrs Lorraine Orbell - Financial Controller, Revd Iain Osborne - Bishop's Senior Chaplain and Strategy Advisor, Revd Peter Leech - Director of Mission and Ministry, Mr Jon Young - Diocesan Director of Education, Mrs Philippa Pearson - Clerk.

Part attendance: Mrs Sarah Kennedy - Head of Safeguarding, Mr Geoffrey Hunter - Diocesan Environmental Officer and Head of Buildings and Pastoral, Sacha Watson - Net Zero Carbon Officer.

APOLOGIES: Revd Natalie Andrews, The Very Revd Mark Bonney, Canon Francis Burkitt, Revd Canon Rob Mackley, Mrs Sarah Robinson, Mr Christopher Townsend, Mrs Felicity Watson.

The Bishop of Huntingdon welcomed members, and the meeting opened with Dwelling in the Word, prepared by Revd Natalie Andrews and led by The Ven Richard Harlow.

1. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None were received for this meeting.

2. MINUTES OF THE BISHOP'S COUNCIL MEETINGS HELD ON 17 MAY 2025**2.1 Approval:**

The minutes were **APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY** and signed.

2.2 Matters arising:

Action points were confirmed as completed or ongoing. There were no other matters arising.

3. BISHOP'S BUSINESS

Bishop Dagmar advised that the former Bishop of Ely, The Rt Revd Dr Anthony Russell died on 09 July 2025. Bishop of Ely from 2000-2010, his funeral will take place later in July. A moment of silence and prayer was kept for the family.

Canon Tim Walters, Chair of EDBF and Chair of Finance Committee, has resigned with immediate effect from all duties. Canon Walters was thanked for his work and commitment to the diocese, and a fuller farewell will be organised in due course.

The Chair posts for EDBF and the Finance Committee have been advertised separately, and an announcement will follow soon for Chair of EDBF. In the Chair of EDBF's absence, Bishop Dagmar and the Acting Diocesan Secretary addressed EDBF Trustee matters at the meeting.

The post of Diocesan Secretary has been offered to Dr George Woods KStJ after recent interviews. A formal offer letter will be sent and subject to the usual checks it is hoped that Dr Woods will be in post before Christmas. Diocesan Synod put in place a delegation to this Council of its right to appoint a Diocesan Secretary.

Council **APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY**, with none against and no abstentions, appointing Dr George Woods KStJ to the post of Diocesan Secretary.

4. Deemed Business

4.1 Papers B-D and F-K were taken as read with no feedback and there were no matters arising. Paper E, Minutes of the Finance Committee 1 July 2025, was withdrawn.

4.2 Love's Farm Church, St Neots

The Ven Richard Harlow

A paper was circulated on a variation of funding permission which was approved at the 30 January 2025 meeting of Council. The full-time post, funded equally by EDBF (£21,000 pa for five years) and contributions from Love's Farm Church members with URC Eastern Synod support, has been advertised twice since February 2025 without success. Love's Farm Church have requested EDBF to allow the 0.5 stipend to be available to other ministers of either Anglican, Baptist or URC backgrounds as these three denominations are constituent members of LEP.

FEEDBACK:

Canon Dr Felicity Cooke: Is there any stipend variation between denominations?

Answer: Not significantly and a cap has been set on EDBF funding.

Canon Simon Kershaw: Does the stipend include pension, and will the minister be an employee of EDBF?

Answer: Pension is included. If an Anglican, the minister will be licensed on Common Tenure, otherwise under their own denomination's arrangements and they may be employed by the LEP.

Mr Christopher Falvey: Can other denominations channel the 0.5 stipend through their denominations' parent organisations?

Answer: In some cases, e.g. Baptists, these organisations don't exist.

Miss Lindsay Davies: What about housing?

Answer: This is already provided by URC.

PROPOSAL: The 0.5 stipend for Love's Farm Church agreed by the Bishop's Council on 30 January 2025 to be available to other ministers of either Anglican, Baptist or URC backgrounds, if required.

PROPOSED: Revd Canon Sarah Gower

SECONDED: Canon Janet Perrett

APPROVED: UNANIMOUS

AGAINST: None

ABSTENTIONS: None

5. SAFEGUARDING REPORT

Bishop Dagmar welcomed Mrs Sarah Kennedy, Head of Safeguarding who joined EDBF on 7 July 2025. Mrs Kennedy advised members that she was previously at the Northamptonshire Children's Trust and has worked in children's care throughout her career.

Key points from the report:

- Casework is busy but a good structured system is in place with an emphasis on telephone calls getting to the right people.
- DBS checks are over 1,000 so far in 2025, a significant increase from 2024.
- Training has a good uptake, and the programme will be reviewed in the future.
- The Dashboard uptake is high and above the national average, a positive for the diocese.
- Good work has been done on Parish Support, particularly with Parish Collaboration.
- There is much work being done to prepare for the Audit which will take place in February 2026, including discussion with the regional safeguarding lead for the East of England.
- A new Managing Allegations Code on Practice from the National Safeguarding Team comes into place on 01 September 2025.

FEEDBACK:

Revd Canon Becky Dyball: Is there any update on a new Chair of Safeguarding for DSAP?

Answer: Candidates have been shortlisted, and interviews will take place on 30 July 2025.

Bishop Dagmar thanked Sarah for her and her team's work, and Mrs Kennedy left the meeting.

6. BUDGET FOR 2026-2028

The Acting Diocesan Secretary

Key points:

- This is a complex budget to bring together which was started in December 2024 and is now on Version 14.
- The Triennium Funding Review (TFR) runs from 2026 and includes several changes.

- A Diocesan Finance Review by Central Church has placed Ely as the second wealthiest diocese in England based on measuring assets v. population of the diocese. As a result, Ely is likely over time to receive less support from the central church.
- It is recommended that the diocese increase stipends by 10.7%, catching up with below-inflation changes over the last decade. Next year this will cost the diocese around £370,000 pa.
- To offset increased contributions, the TFR will offer tapering relief ('parachute funding') of c.£2M over nine years. This will cover the increase in stipends but overall, it will be a net negative impact for the diocese after three years.
- The projected deficit of -£500,000 can be offset from parachute funding to achieve a break-even budget by 2030, but income needs to be increased. Documents circulated to members set out various ways forward to achieve this.

FEEDBACK:

Mr Jon Smith: What decisions have been taken?

Answer: None yet - budget proposals are set out on page two in Paper M.

The Ven Richard Harlow: What are the potential mitigations?

Answer: The DFR was passed at General Synod in July 2025, and payment terms of parachute funding has yet to be advised.

Revd Canon James Blandford-Baker: The 10.7% stipend increase involves a 6.5% catch-up payment to cover under-payments in the last decade, and 4.2% to adjust for 2025 inflation.

Dr Jonathan Chaplin: We appreciate the care that has been taken on financial methodology and future options.

Mr George Lynn: What is the future strategy for the diocese on managing the deficit increase; to focus on an increase in income or create additional charges?

Answer: To improve income for parishes and focus on ministry projects to enable this.

Canon Dr Felicity Cooke: Ely Diocese has come out negatively from the TFR process this time around, however, it was agreed at General Synod in July that there should be more consultations for the next TRF.

Canon Simon Kershaw: At Diocesan Synod in June the view was expressed that the direct debit discount should not be reduced as this would provoke a negative effect and not necessarily create savings.

Revd Canon Philip Howson: Communications need to be considered in the future as a recent request for an extra £9,000 per deanery did not detail what this was for.

Canon Dr Felicity Cooke: SMMIB funding was considered at the May meeting, and it was decided to postpone this until a new bishop was in place. Strengthening Multi-Parish Benefices should come from SMMIB funding.

Answer: As this is smaller project, this will be funded by EDBF. We will bid for SMMIB when we have a new bishop.

Mr George Lynn: Will funding multi-parish benefices and new housing be from capital reserves or are they allocated in the budget forecast?

Answer: Currently not in the budget forecast.

Revd Danny Driver: Are these projects in line with previous deanery planning projects? Is it feasible to increase giving if we see lower attendance figures in the diocese?

Answer: The three most common requests in the 2023 Deanery Development Plans were for support with administration, youth projects and new housing; that is why this is being proposed now. Attendance is recorded as not falling across the diocese, per-head giving is relatively low, and there is a lot of scope to improve how stewardship is communicated in parishes. The 'Cornerstone' project is being trailed in March deanery which offers fundraising projects to be implemented across stages to help increase income.

Mr Jon Smith: Do we have effective governance for this work, and why is it proposed to review our governance again?

Answer: Bishop's Council meetings set out plans and governance.

Mr Christopher Falvey: There needs to be clarity on what on funds Trustees are voting for, which is not in the papers for this meeting.

Answer: The Bishop's Council meeting on 25 September will agree the budget and further details can be provided then. It is proposed to look at this again in a spirit of continuous improvement.

Dr Jonathan Chaplin: Have projects advised previously been budget approved?

Revd Canon Philip Howson: While a global budget is important, appointing a new Diocesan Secretary will help drive progress. Some work should proceed, even without exact figures, to foster a more positive outlook.

Answer: Figures and governance have previously been outlined.

The Bishop's Senior Staff team suggested that, in line with these previous discussions, the Council might see 'Investing in Growing Younger' as a high diocesan priority and ask Finance Committee to look again at how this could be funded (on a smaller scale than previously anticipated).

Motions given in the Finance report to support mission and ministry projects, as presented at the 17 May 2025 Bishop's Council and 18 June 2025 Diocesan Synod meetings, were amended to ensure clarity at the Council's September meeting on what funds Trustees will be asked for, and to ask the Finance Committee to review again 'Growing Younger' funding

MOTIONS (A):

This Bishops Council as Directors/Trustees of the Ely Diocesan Board of Finance are in agreement in principle with the proposal to accept the 2026 budget as it stands in a transitional year on the given assumptions but accept that plans need to be made over the next couple of years to further increase income and or reduce costs to rebalance the budget.

However, the approval of the 2026 budget is subject to consultation with the Deanery Liaison Group (DLG) on 22 July and further discussion by the Finance Committee on 24 July before returning to Bishops Council in September for final approval in advance of the budget to be submitted to Diocesan Synod in October.

PROPOSED: Revd Dr Beth Cope

SECONDED: Revd Canon Becky Dyball

APPROVED: UNANIMOUS

AGAINST: None

ABSTENTIONS: None

MOTIONS (B):

Motions 1-5 are subject to approving a specific financial budget in September, and Council resolved the following:

1. This Bishop's Council as Directors/Trustees of the Ely Diocesan Board of Finance in agreement with the proposal to fund "Investing in Growing Giving and Generosity" work stream out of general operating funds.
2. This Bishop's Council as Directors/Trustees of the Ely Diocesan Board of Finance in agreement with the proposal for the "Strengthening Multi-Parish Benefices" work stream, could be funded out of general capital reserves for an initial period of 2026-30.
3. This Bishop's Council as Directors/Trustees of the Ely Diocesan Board of Finance approves the proposal that the housing element of "Investing in New Housing" could be funded from the DPA, and the stipends and diocesan co-ordination elements out of general capital reserves.
4. This Bishop's Council is resolved to work with the Diocesan Secretary, Finance Committee and TAG to further develop our structures of accountability so as to achieve assurance about effectiveness and efficiency, especially in these projects.
5. This Bishop's Council as Directors/Trustees of the Ely Diocesan Board of Finance considers that the 'Investing in Growing Younger' work stream represents a high diocesan priority, and requests the Finance Committee to consider how best to fund spending up to max £100k each year for 2 years on this project.

The Acting Diocesan Secretary clarified that the meeting was also approving the Mission Priorities workstreams. The cost over five years, from 2026 to 2030, is estimated to be about £2.25m with the proposed total spend on projects as follows:

Investing in Growing Giving and Generosity: £150,000 over the period from 2026-2028

Strengthening Multi-Parish Benefices - £732,000 over the period from 2026 to 2030

Investing in New Housing - £1,176,176 on clergy costs over the period from 2026 to 2030

Investing in Growing Younger - £200,000 over the period from 2026-2027

PROPOSED: Revd Canon Sarah Gower

SECONDED: The Ven Dr Alex Hughes

APPROVED: IN FAVOUR

AGAINST: None

ABSTENTIONS: 2

7. NET ZERO CARBON PROJECT REPORT

Mr Geoffrey Hunter - Diocesan Environmental Officer (DEO) and Head of Church Buildings and Pastoral

Sacha Watson - Net Zero Carbon Officer (NZCO)

The report circulated gave a background summary for the project looking at achievements gained across churches, schools, clergy houses, eco-church, land and nature. Challenges were identified for all as well. Mr Hunter reported that the diocese has been granted £170k over three years as a capacity-building grant, and this will contribute to the salary of the NZCO and an environmental audit of a selection of buildings, environmental monitoring and other projects. This grant came out of National Triennium Funding of £190m over nine years. It was noted that the diocese is one of eight that has not yet achieved an eco-church Bronze award, with one of the factors against this being that an environmental policy is not in place. This policy is currently being circulated for feedback from all departments. It was also noted that the response rate to the energy footprint tool in this diocese was now by far the highest in the eastern region.

ACTION: GH/SW

Mr Hunter noted that the annual carbon footprint for the diocese is c.6,000 tonnes of CO₂, equivalent to 15 Jumbo jets flying across the Atlantic.

FEEDBACK:

The Ven Dr Alex Hughes: It is good that the top 20% of carbon emitter churches in the diocese have been identified.

Answer: There will be additional focus to identify a mixture of rural and urban churches in the Triennium Funding grant, and parishes will be asked to engage with eco-church initially.

Mrs Elaine Levitt: How are the top 20% of churches defined?

Answer: Carbon footprint calculations are taken from the annual Energy Footprint Tool that parishes complete; the figures are from the 2023 report. In 2024, 75% of parishes completed the Tool and so far in 2025 this is 88%.

The Ven Richard Harlow: Do we need more education for users to reduce our diocesan carbon output?

Answer: There are two aspects for this. Eco-church involves engagement with each parish's community on congregation's individual carbon use, whilst planned carbon use tracing for diocesan staff will help to encourage less emissions along with communicating this behaviour change to schools, churches and the community.

Dr Jonathan Chaplin: The second Bishop's Advisor required for Climate Change will need to lead on sustainable Gospel considerations.

Thanks were given to Mr Hunter and Sacha Watson for their work.

8. HR REVIEW

Revd Canon Philip Howson

The report provided a comprehensive review of the HR function within EDBF, focussing on management culture, work with external providers and overall effectiveness.

Key findings:

- EDBF staff should be commended for their good morale and hard work.
- Structural HR aspects present risks to EDBF as HR services have been outsourced, with the previous Diocesan Secretary as HR lead, rather than appointing in-house. Whilst this

appears to be a reasonable approach given the size of EDBF staffing, it has been expensive and created risks.

- While the organisation has adopted effective HR management models and guidance, implementation has not been fully optimised, and the greatest risk is that there are essentially no policies for managers. This absence has significantly contributed to costs and risks: the average cost is £82k pa and whilst in good years this is £67k pa, in years with significant severance payments it is £93k pa.
- Policies are mostly OK.
- HR services and severance pay decisions were not fully evaluated for their impact on financial considerations.
- The absence of in-house HR expertise slowed down CMT projects and meant that HR wisdom was lacking in the initiation of the project.
- Most neighbouring dioceses employ in-house HR management and leadership.
- Staff representation could be better.

The HR Review Group recommend the need to immediately appoint dedicated HR management either internally or externally. It was noted that without internal HR leadership EDBF are in a vulnerable situation, and this needs to be addressed now.

FEEDBACK:

Mr Jon Young: The report offers opportunities for positive change and to meet objectives for Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod.

Mr Jon Green: Options within the budget can be explored to create funding.

The Ven Dr Alex Hughes: The report is welcomed and whilst an internal solution is favourable, should we wait for the new Diocesan Secretary to be in post to drive this?

Answer: We need to do something imminently and should avoid the Diocesan Secretary managing HR.

Revd Canon James Blandford-Baker: The urgency is understood, but could the new Diocesan Secretary be consulted?

Canon Dr Felicity Cooke: Pleased to receive this report which is of a high standard. If an external HR specialist is used, we should be aware of the risks, and it would be good if the new Diocesan Secretary is involved with the recruitment process.

Revd Canon Becky Dyball: Please confirm that exit interviews were done, as minuted at previous meetings, as this is a trust consideration if they have not. Can the contract with Peninsula be terminated early?

Answer: Confirmation that exit interviews have been done. The HR Review Group reassured that the report expresses that the panel did not see any evidence of exit interviews, rather than asserting proof of absence. In addition, senior managers have a form for use when employees leave.

The Peninsula contract would cost 85% of the remaining period if terminated early.

Revd Iain Osborne: The exact task of an HR resource remains to be established, in that diocesan clergy support still needs to be considered. A new Diocesan Secretary may want to look at operations holistically.

Answer: Need to be careful not to box the HR role as permanent at this stage.

The Ven Richard Harlow: Winchester Diocese had an in-house part-time HR; are we looking at a full-time post? Planning needs to start now if so, and a temporary solution should be considered in the meantime.

Bishop Dagmar: We are not using the full potential of services that Peninsula offer and this should be considered.

Revd Canon Becky Dyball: Judith Knight HR works for other dioceses and has experience of working with the Church of England and Peninsula.

The Ven Dr Alex Hughes: After these discussions, an external HR solution is more favourable at this stage as we need to get on with this.

Canon Dr Felicity Cooke: It would be beneficial to talk to a HR consultant now to aide planning in the long term for an internal post.

Bishop Dagmar thanked members for a helpful and full discussion on HR requirements going forward.

PROPOSAL:

To consider a hybrid HR model at this stage and work immediately with a specialised HR consultant to implement priority and urgent HR models as noted in the HR Review; to work with Peninsula to utilise their services fully; to work on an implementation plan for a full-time HR post in the long term. EDBF will be in contact with the new Diocesan Secretary for discussions and input on HR plans going forward.

APPROVED: UNANIMOUS

AGAINST: None

ABSTENTIONS: None

The Acting Diocesan Secretary and Bishop Dagmar will action this proposal. **ACTION: JG/+D**

9. RISK REGISTER

Mr George Lynn

It was noted that a Risk Register had not been received by Council for some time, and the Acting Diocesan Secretary with others are working on a revised one which will be brought to the Audit Committee meeting in September. **ACTION: JG/GL**

It was also noted that the Peninsula contract was expanded to include Health and Safety aspects which has increased costs.

10. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR OF THE VACANCY-IN-SEE COMMITTEE 2025-2027

The results of a secret ballot:

Revd Robert Slipper - 2 votes

The Ven Richard Harlow - 18 votes

The Ven Richard Harlow was duly appointed by Bishop Dagmar as the Chair of the Vacancy-in-See Committee 2025-2027.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

SO86 questions from Mr Christopher Townsend, Canon Lizzie Taylor and Mr Jon Smith with answers provided were circulated before the meeting. No further feedback or questions were raised.

Bishop Dagmar thanked Revd Canon James Blandford-Baker for his work at the July General Synod and noted the valuable spirit of collaboration in discussing solutions together at Bishop's Council, and thanked members.

Bishop Dagmar reminded members of the conflict and situation in the West Bank and in Gaza, and moment of silence was taken to remember those who are living with uncertainty and war.

The meeting closed at 21:10.

Dates of next meetings, all at Etheldreda House:

- Thursday 25 September at 6.45pm (meeting as Bishop's Council)
- Wednesday 26 November at 6.45pm (meeting as EDBF)

Signed:

Date:

SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS		
ITEM	ACTION	BY WHO
7	Environmental policy circulation and finalisation	GH/SW
8	Implement short-term HR solution and discuss with new Diocesan Secretary	JG/+D
9	Finalise revised Risk Register for September Audit Committee	JG/GL
17 May 2025 meeting 9	Advice for clergy members of Bishop's Council on Conflicts of Interest	JG