

THE BISHOP'S COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON Thursday 28 September 2023
In person at St Mary's, Ely

Present: The Bishop of Huntingdon (in the Chair), Revd Canon James Blandford-Baker, Very Revd Mark Bonney, Canon Dr Felicity Cooke, Ms Lindsay Davies, Revd Becky Dyball, Revd Canon Sarah Gower, Ven Richard Harlow, Ven Dr Alex Hughes, Canon Simon Kershaw, Mrs Elaine Levitt, Revd Dr Robert Mackley, Revd Canon Dr Jessica Martin, Revd David Newton, Revd Iain Osborne, Canon Janet Perrett, Mr John Pigott, Mrs Sarah Robinson, Revd Canon Simon Talbott, Canon Tim Walters

In attendance: Canon Paul Evans, Ms Rebecca Boswell, Mrs Sheena Bridgman

Dwelling in the Word was led by the Revd Canon Simon Talbott

Apologies were received from Revd Canon Brian Atling, Canon Francis Burkitt, Mr George Lynn, Canon Peter Maxwell, Canon Rob Needle, Canon Andrew Read, Canon Lizzie Taylor, Mr Christopher Townsend

The **Minutes** of the Bishop's Council meeting held on 27 July 2023 were agreed and signed by the Bishop of Huntingdon. There were no **matters arising**.

Bishop's Business: The Bishop of Huntingdon updated Council about the progress of the Vacancy in See Committee and the process for electing the next Bishop of Ely. She told of the successful visits by a Nordkirche group as well as a visit by Bishop Nathan from Kigali. In early November there is to be a three-day Bishop's Staff Residential at Douai Abbey. The LLM licensing will take place on Saturday 30 September 2023, and there are interviews for the new Diocesan Director of Ordinands (DDO) on 6 October 2023.

Safeguarding Update from Rebecca Boswell, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser. There are 186 referrals at the year to date, with 45 open concerns. There are 21 Church Safety Plans (formerly Safeguarding Agreements) in place which encompass less than five allegations against Church officers. 326 have undertaken face-to-face Leadership Trainings - there has been a new module in place since September which is receiving positive feedback. 1200 DBS checks have been carried out - the digital DBS checks can be carried out very swiftly and are now being offered across the Diocese. 77% of parishes have now signed up for the Parish Dashboard (a total of 248). Five Safeguarding Standards have been issued in draft on which the Diocese's safeguarding strategy is devised. No new information is included, they are more for clarification. A country wide safeguarding audit commences in late 2024, with Ely's audit, at present, taking place late in the process (likely February 2026)

The Diocesan Secretary thanked Ms Boswell and her team

Business of Ely Diocesan Board of Finance: Canon Tim Walters (TW), EDBF Chair, explained the management accounts to August 2023, observing that some parishes continue to withhold payment of Ministry Share. These parishes have agreed to pay at a minimum the direct costs for their stipendiary clergy by end November, following decisions made at the General Synod sessions early that month. Direct costs include stipend, tax, national insurance and pension, plus the statutory costs for housing, some utilities and safeguarding. He noted that there is ongoing active recruitment for clergy.

As the current 2024 Budget shows a £200k deficit, the Chair of the EDBF is reviewing departmental costs with all Departmental Heads to ensure they are suitable for purpose. It may be necessary to cease some activities or make adjustments in order to reduce these costs.

Ministry Share will be increased by 4% with clergy stipends rising by 5%. The difference will be funded from investment income.

The Diocesan Secretary explained that it would be necessary to identify £120,000 of costs and pledged to reduce these costs at a rate of approximately £10,000 per month (or the equivalent savings) in order to achieve a zero balance at end 2024.

TW commended the 2024 Budget to Council

Motion to accept 2024 Budget and to put it forward to Diocesan Synod (subject to monthly savings)

Proposed: Canon Tim Walters Seconded: Ven Dr Alex Hughes

Agreed unanimously

Relocation Board: Canon Tim Walters as Chair of the Board reported that the programme status is currently green, the contractors are progressing fast. The Project Working Group has created a blog with photographs which are updated regularly. The specification and quotations for furniture, furnishings and equipment are being prepared and sought with the aim of installing these soon after handover of the keys in Q1 2024. An All Staff Zoom is taking place on 11 October to keep staff informed and up to date, to answer questions about the inside of the building. A CGI walk through is available to view. He reinforced that no funds for the building are coming from Ministry Share.

Net Zero Carbon: Geoffrey Hunter, Head of Church Buildings and Pastoral. The national church has required every Diocese to employ personnel to address the Net Zero Carbon commitment from General Synod. Ely proposes to employ two part-time personnel (part-funded from the centre), and to commission professional audits of Diocesan properties. A dynamic action plan for the administration offices has been developed by Revd Canon Nigel Cooper in consultation with Diocesan Heads of Departments

Northstowe Charitable Incorporated Organisation: Revd Canon Sarah Gower (SG) introduced her tabled paper and advised the CIO has been agreed and is going ahead. Significant funding has been made available by the United Reformed Church in order to bid for a plot land on which to build a meeting space. Further details will be available in January 2024. After discussion, Council believed that the Diocese should demonstrate its commitment to the CIO.

Proposal to commit £60,000 from the New Churches Fund for the purposes of the Charitable Incorporated Organisation at Northstowe.

Proposed: Revd Canon Sarah Gower Seconded: Revd Canon James Blandford-Baker

Agreed unanimously

Deanery Development Planning: the Archdeacons advised that 14 of the Diocese's 15 Deaneries had submitted their plans by end July 2023. Some of the elements raised include concerns about finances, pastoral reorganisation, giving and extra posts plus the challenges of buildings maintenance. The Archdeacons highlighted some notable omissions identifying the need for guidance and exploration in some areas: lack of thinking evangelism, discipleship and spirituality and plans for action to realise aspirations. The Diocesan Department for Education Mission and Ministry have initiated responses to the Deaneries' aspirations and needs, targetting resources to meet these and guiding those with buildings' requirements towards the REACH Ely resources. It was agreed that this would be discussed further at future meetings of Bishop's Council

The Diocesan Secretary announced formally that Revd Iain Osborne had accepted the offer of employment as the Diocesan Director for Planning and will commence on 3 January 2024

DMPC Business: The Archdeacons advised that there was nothing to report.

Elections : Diocesan Synod elections will be held in July 2024 and the paper listing clergy and lay representation by Deanery was noted prior to endorsement at Diocesan Synod

There being no further business, the meeting closed with prayer at 9.02pm