

THE BISHOP'S COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON Thursday 21 March 2024
A meeting in person at St Mary's, Ely

Present: The Bishop of Huntingdon (in the Chair), Revd Canon Brian Atling, Revd Canon James Blandford-Baker, Very Revd Mark Bonney, Canon Dr Felicity Cooke, Ms Lindsay Davies, Revd Canon Becky Dyball, Revd Canon Sarah Gower, Ven Richard Harlow, Ven Dr Alex Hughes, Canon Simon Kershaw, Revd Canon Dr Robert Mackley, Revd Canon Dr Jessica Martin, Canon Peter Maxwell Canon Rob Needle, Canon Janet Perrett, Mr John Pigott, Mrs Sarah Robinson, Revd Canon Simon Talbott, Mr Christopher Townsend, Canon Tim Walters

In attendance: Ms Rebecca Boswell, Mrs Sheena Bridgman, Revd Peter Leech, Revd Iain Osborne

Dwelling in the Word was led by Canon Lizzie Taylor.

Apologies were received from Canon Francis Burkitt, Canon Paul Evans, Mrs Elaine Levitt, Mr George Lynn, Revd Canon Dr Rob Mackley, Revd Canon Dr Jessica Martin

The **Minutes** of the Bishop's Council meeting held on 31 January 2024 will have the Changing Market Towns tables amended and then be forwarded to the Bishop of Huntingdon for signature.

There were no **matters arising**.

Update from Diocesan Synod meeting held on 9 March 2024 by the Chair of the House of Laity. Sarah Gower and Simon Kershaw - Question under SO86 regarding Deanery Synod Standing Orders - these are being updated to reflect the Diocesan Synod Standing Orders and will be circulated for consultation as soon as possible. Resilience of staffing in the Diocesan Office was answered by the Chair of the EDBF. Topics for future Synod meetings were discussed and will be included during the next Synod agenda planning meetings. A mature debate about the House of Bishops reactions to the ongoing situation in Gaza was well received.

Bishop's Business - there will be an additional meeting of Bishop's Council on Monday 8 April 2024 to discuss the HR Review Group's first report. Looking forward. Reserved business - EDBF staff to leave. Interviews for the Diocesan Director of Education have been held and an offer of employment made.

Safeguarding update from Rebecca Boswell, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

45 referrals have been entered onto the Casework Management System in the year to date. There are 47 open concerns - 21 of which have Church Safety Plans. Less than 5 of these relate to Church Officers (mostly behaviour and conduct outside church). One goes to Crown Court on 15 April 2024.

Licensed clergy are being encouraged to ensure they are keeping their safeguarding training current. The Safeguarding Team are looking to develop and offer bespoke training and workshops.

297 DBS checks have been carried out to date in 2024

Following a programme of publicity and promotion regarding the Parish Dashboard, 258 parishes are now live - although not all are active. The Safeguarding Team are working through a parish watchlist to offer targeted support where there is low activity. Workshops to teach about use of the Parish Dashboard are planned.

A number of parishes are being offered focussed support by the Safeguarding Team to assist them to achieve compliance. Monthly drop ins with the Safeguarding team have been planned at Etheldreda House for the remainder of 2024. Safeguarding Senior Leadership training starts in July 2024.

Jay response team have been in contact with questionnaire/survey attached.

Chair of EDBF - Canon Tim Walters - reviewed accounts

Business of Ely Diocesan Board of Finance. Canon Tim Walters, EDBF Chair, reviewed a first draft of the annual accounts for 2023. A potential breakeven result has been achieved through greater than budgeted Ministry Share receipts (95% compared to a budget of 92% receipt). Investment income was also higher

The calculation and allocation of Ministry Share will be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the Deanery Liaison Group with a view to encouraging support and subsidy between parishes and potentially at Deanery level (equitable levelling up).

Annual Accounts prepared under Statutory Guidelines and International Accounting Standard body.

Relocation Board. Practical completion was 2 weeks late. Snagging work is ongoing to prepare the building for occupation at the end of April. A soft opening for staff will take place on 22 April with a blessing from the Acting Bishop of Ely. A booking system for hot desk working is being finalised by Jon Green with roll out planned for the start of May. Closed offices for Diocesan Secretary, Safeguarding, Finance, Directors and Surveyors' Office have been created. A more public occasion will take place later in the year.

EDBF Staff are being given a number of vouchers for use in the Apex Coffee House by way of a thank you.

Members of Bishop's Council expressed their gratitude to EDBF employees for their forbearance.

The Acting Bishop of Ely emphasised again that no Ministry Share funds have been used to build the new offices.

Church of England Defined Benefit Scheme. Six members remain in this scheme of whom several are close to retirement. The EDBF Chair reminded Council that substantial deficits have had to be made up over previous years which have had to be covered. While the fund is currently in surplus, it was recommended that the Diocese of Ely crystallise its present value and pay these funds into the Church Workers Pension Fund, which is the scheme into which new joiners are entered. This is expected to be the only opportunity to buy out the scheme in surplus.

The current fund may in future to be wound up by the Church of England Pensions Board. The benefits at retirement age for the existing members would be matched to the levels at which they would have been paid under the original scheme and payments will be made at 23.6% of salary for the next 18 months.

Two letters of consultation containing detailed information have been circulated to the six affected members of staff.

Bishop's Council was given an undertaking that Finance Committee would monitor the fund performances and give an annual appraisal report. The £400,000 available from the pension package can only contribute to new Pension Fund.

Members of Bishop's Council were asked to approve closure of the Diocese of Ely Defined Benefit Scheme, moving the six EDBF employees to the Classic Scheme, contributing 23.6% of salary with the request that there is an annual appraisal and report from Finance Committee

Proposed
One abstention

Canon Tim Walters
Canon Lizzie Taylor

Seconded

Revd Canon Becky Dyball

Approved by a majority

Thanks were passed to Mrs Lorraine Orbell and the Finance Team.

The Acting Bishop of Ely advised Bishop's Council that Delivery Oversight Board is no longer meeting before passing to Revd Iain Osborne (IO), Deputy Director of Strategy, who presented his outline paper on the proposed **Trustee Assurance Group (TAG)** and suggested that there is potential overlap between the work that TAG aims to do and that covered by areas the HR Review Group are investigating. Task and Finish/HR Review Group outcomes have not been fully presented or addressed to date and it was felt that those outcomes should be carefully explored.

IO invited members of Bishop's Council to join the Trustee Assurance Group and to contact him direct in this regard in order to start the process as soon as possible in a "shadow" capacity.

IO introduced the outline **Strategy Working Model Programme** paper to ensure members understood the position. He presented the paper as an initial opportunity to invite comment and suggestions for content. The work programme incorporates a distillation of questions from Deanery Development Plans and again invited members to join the Steering Group. Output by end 2024 is anticipated to be a series of working papers to inform the more formal strategic processes through 2025.

Bishop's Council acting as **Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee**. Minutes from CADMPC and HWADMPC meetings were noted.

The Archdeacon of Cambridge advised Bishop's Council that the level at which Housing Allowance is paid to stipendiary clergy needs to be reviewed by Finance Committee, and there is one clergy post in Cambridge for which there is no house.

The Archdeacon of Huntingdon & Wisbech reported that an Ely Deanery Pastoral Plan has been prepared in consultation with the relevant patrons creating an 11 parish "Isle of Ely" team. The proposal in advance of a new pastoral scheme involves a substantial redrawing of boundaries and is a cost neutral plan regarding clergy posts. Bishop's Council were asked for their approval.

Proposed:
Agreed unanimously

Ven Richard Harlow

Seconded: Canon Janet Perrett

The Archdeacon of Huntingdon & Wisbech requested Bishop's Council approval for the creation of an interim common tenure clergy post in Wisbech Lynn Marshland for three years, renewable for a further 3-year term maximum. This should be seen as a Change Management post.

Proposed:
1 abstention:

Ven Richard Harlow
Mr Christopher Townsend

Seconded: Revd Canon Sarah Gower

Approved by majority

Elections for Bishop's Council 2024-27 will take place in Autumn 2024 as part of the several elections to statutory committees. Papers will be prepared following the Diocesan Synod elections in July 2024.

Report from the **HR Review Group** - the Bishop of Huntingdon proposed an additional meeting of Bishop's Council members to discuss further the content of the prepared report. She emphasised

the need for confidentiality. Kelly Sayers, Keystone Law, has seen the initial draft of the report and had made recommendations. Bishop Dagmar stated her wish that the proposed additional meeting focus on future processes and where the report from the HR Review Group might support the work to be carried out by Revd Iain Osborne.

The additional meeting was agreed to be held on Monday 8 April at 6.45pm at St Mary's Ely, in a hybrid manner.

Sincere thanks were given to Canon Dr Felicity Cooke and her HR Review Group colleagues.

Boards and Committees. Reports from the Diocesan Advisory Committee, DSAP and Changing Market Towns Board and Church Uses Committee were noted.

Any Other Business - there was none

The meeting closed with prayer at 8.58pm.