

THE BISHOP'S COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON Wednesday 31 January 2024
A hybrid meeting over Zoom and in person at St Mary's, Ely

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

Attending via Zoom: Mrs Elaine Levitt, Canon Lizzie Taylor

In attendance: Mr Adam Evans, Canon Paul Evans, Ms Rebecca Boswell, Mr Jon Chapman, Mrs Sally Gilson, Mr Jon Green, Revd Peter Leech, Ven Hugh McCurdy, Revd Iain Osborne, Revd Jon Randall

Apologies were received from Revd Canon James Blandford-Baker, Mrs Sheena Bridgman, Canon Francis Burkitt, Ms Lindsay Davies, Canon Simon Kershaw, Mr George Lynn, Canon Peter Maxwell

Dwelling in the Word was led by Mr Christopher Townsend.

The **Minutes** of the Bishop's Council meeting held on 23 November 2023 were agreed with two amendments and would be forwarded to the Bishop of Huntingdon for signature.

1. The Revd Dr Robert Mackley was not in attendance.
2. The Changing Market Towns ministry has encountered some challenges.

There were no **matters arising**.

Safeguarding Annual Review from Rebecca Boswell, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser and Jon Chapman, Independent Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Group. The annual report for 2023 was presented at Paper A. Safeguarding referrals are currently static and down from 2023 with the Safeguarding Team continuing to support parishes with the leadership module. The Diocesan strategy is centred around the National Safeguarding Standards which are not mandatory but enable the team to identify what is being achieved well. The main focus is on the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard and 78.4% of parishes are using it. The audit tool would be circulated. The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser has been elected to an Executive Safeguarding Group for eight Dioceses.

There are currently 74 open concerns, the majority of which are congregational (i.e. not church officer) issues. One serious case will be presented in court in February 2024 and involves a member of the congregation in one of our parishes. There are 22 charges. The Bishop of Huntingdon confirmed that the safeguarding culture in Ely Diocese identified this case very early and conveyed her thanks to the Safeguarding Team.

The Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Group also conveyed his thanks for the strong leadership provided by the experienced Safeguarding Team, the care of victims came out well in the cases review.

Changing Market Towns - options for the future. The Revd Jon Randall and the Ven Hugh McCurdy gave a presentation on the Market Towns initiative and options for the future. Pre 2010 areas for growth were identified in the market towns. In 2015 key areas were again identified and Bishop's Council decided to invest in the Market Towns Initiative with funding being provided by the National Church. A financial summary was presented.

Breakdown of Mission Development Fund:

| Source, £000s | Diocesan | SMMIB (SDF) | Total |
|----------------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| Reset Nov 2022 | 36 | 118 | 154 |
| St Neots C&F | 135 | 0 | 135 |
| St Neots Youth | 80 | 0 | 80 |
| St Neots Ops Manager | 35 | 0 | 35 |
| March | 43 | 62 | 105 |
| Whittlesey | 60 | 0 | 60 |
| Total | 389 | 180 | 569 |

Proposal for the future:

- Chatteris - no additional allocation proposed
- Huntingdon Youth Missioner - £53K to end of 2025/parish funding for a further year
- Huntingdon Children & Families Missioner - £110K:
 - Existing to September 2025
 - Additional from September 2024 for one year+
 - Additional for two years + parish funds.
- Littleport Sports and Wellbeing Youth Missioner £140K for a 5-year project (years 4&5 alongside parish funding)
- March - no additional allocation proposed
- Ramsey - £30K to extend C&F to 2027 alongside parish
- Wisbech - £75K for SMART proposal with new Rector
- Parachute payments - £80K for matched funding
- Local Operations Manager - £50K to end 2025
- Release of funds of £31K - “ringfenced” for mission

Breakdown for this proposal:

| Allocation for | Diocesan £K | SIB£K | Total £K |
|------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| Huntingdon Youth | | 53 | 53 |
| Huntingdon C&F | 110 | | 110 |
| Littleport Youth | 75 | 65 | 140 |
| Ramsey | 30 | | 30 |
| Wisbech | 75 | | 75 |
| Parachute payments | 68 | 12 | 80 |
| Local Ops Manager | 0 | 50 | 50 |
| Release of funds | 31 | 0 | 31 |
| Total available | 389 | 180 | 569 |

It was confirmed that the parachute payments allocation is money put aside for suggested proposals and £111K had, today, been approved by the Changing Market Towns Board.

It was acknowledged that the impact of this initiative needs to be communicated to clergy. Lessons learnt would be implemented and conveyed to Bishop’s Council.

A decision was required from Bishop's Council to support the allocation of funds, agree that the Changing Market Towns Board should continue until the end of 2025, and to identify a new Chair to lead the Board and support the project, with the current Chair retiring at the end of March 2024. Jon Randall's role as Project Lead will end in August 2024.

In favour 11
Abstentions 2

The decision was carried.

Bishop's Business. The Bishop of Huntingdon reported that Pippa Blackall (The Wissey Valley Benefice) would be ordained on 4 February 2024, Maundy money has been allocated to Donald Ashmore and Canon Janet Perrett, and year 3 Curates are encouragingly being signed off. It was reported that clergy had not been paid this month and the impact this would have on some members of clergy was recognised. The issue has subsequently been corrected. This matter will be raised at General Synod questions and the Union will be raising it with the National Church team.

The Bishop encouraged members to read an article in the Church Times on 26 January 2024 by the Bishop of Newcastle about Living in Love and Faith, which is receiving mixed views.

On 9 March 2024 Diocesan Synod would be discussing the Safeguarding review, the Church Buildings Partnership, Finance, the General Synod report, the Private Member report, Vacancy-in-See, Bishop's Council report and the forthcoming elections.

Business of Ely Diocesan Board of Finance. Canon Tim Walters, EDBF Chair, advised members that at the **Finance Committee** on 25 January 2024 the budget for 2025, the process for reappraising stipend numbers (ongoing), cashflow (sale and purchase of clergy housing), and ministry share were discussed.

A report on **Management accounts** up to November 2023 was given, and there is a requirement to reduce the contribution to stipend clergy pensions. Following discussion in RASC, the national stipend benchmark will be increased by 7% and not 5% in 2023/24.

The **EDBF Reserves Policy** would be audited in March 2024 and presented to Bishop's Council, in draft form, on 21 March 2024.

Relocation Board. Practical completion is scheduled for 19 February 2024, the focus was now on disability access requirements, furniture and equipment, operating costs and best use of the building.

Canon Tim Walters expressed his thanks to Adam Evans for his work as the Programme Manager.

Education update. The Ven Dr Alex Hughes presented a job description for the Diocesan Director of Education, the recruitment process had now started with interviews planned during March 2024. The interim Director will retire on 2 April 2024.

HR Review Group update - The review was in progress. Canon Felicity Cooke invited comments on the interim report presented by 21 February 2024. The Bishop of Huntingdon conveyed her thanks to Felicity, Christopher Townsend and Susan Pope for this work.

Clergy Complaints Handling Policy. The Archdeacon of Huntingdon and Wisbech presented the Policy, which had been approved by the Registry. The following changes were put forward by members:

- Under Step 2
 - - Notes taken by the Archdeacon should be agreed by all parties, signed and dated.
 - - When the Archdeacon asks another person to be present at a meeting, all parties involved should be notified in advance.

The Archdeacon confirmed that the Policy will be reviewed in 2026, in line with General Synod. A report would be presented to Bishop's Council in 12 months' time with feedback from both Archdeacons.

Unanimously agreed with the two amendments to be made.

Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee. Reports from CADMPC and HWADMPC were noted. The Archdeacon of Huntingdon and Wisbech asked Bishop's Council to approve the level of subsidy required by Wisbech Lynn Marshland deanery to sustain 5.5 posts and it was agreed that this would be considered at the next Bishop's Council meeting.

Boards and Committees. Reports from the Diocesan Advisory Committee and Church Uses Committee were noted.

Any Other Business - Delivery of the Ely 2025 Programme. A brief presentation was made by the Revd Iain Osborne (Deputy Director of Strategy). A "Trustee Assurance Group" (which is a working title) needs to be formed and led by Bishop's Council members. The Diocesan Secretary confirmed that the Chair of this group, and the Chair of the Changing Market Towns Board needs to be an independent trustee, not an EDBF contracted employee. Iain Osborne will be touch with Council Members to invite them to an informal discussion shortly.

The meeting closed with prayer at 8.48pm.