

Spring 2023
Report from the Bishops Diocesan Council

This report from the Diocesan Secretary is on behalf of the Bishops Diocesan Council (BDC) and is addressed to members of Diocesan Synod. This paper has been approved by BDC and may be forwarded or passed on by members.

1. Fruitfulness and Sustainability

BDC have invested significant time in issues relating to the “fruitfulness and sustainability” of mission and ministry in the diocese. Our plans for this focus on implementing the twelve deanery plans and thereby realising the vision described in The Saints Way.

- Deanery Plans and the Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal

BDC have approved a Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal that draws the twelve deanery plans together, describes how deanery and parish leaders will be supported to implement those plans, and in addition to deanery plans sets out measures that will be taken to support the fruitfulness and sustainability of the church in Cornwall.

The three main themes in the Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal are changing patterns of ministry, reversing the decline in the number of children and young people with whom we have significant engagement, and a shift towards supporting mission and ministry in areas experiencing deprivation. We expect the Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal to come to the May Diocesan Synod.

- Financial challenges and opportunities

The 2023 diocesan budget was built mainly on the shape of ministry described in the twelve deanery plans but noting that most plans are yet to be fully implemented we are seeing a bigger difference between budget and “actual” income and expenditure than we might have otherwise expected.

Cost inflation, particularly for property and carbon net zero works, is beginning to have an impact on current and medium-term budgeting. The BDC have noted the need to maintain strict financial controls at both Church House and in parish ministry costs to make sure that our long-term plans are achievable.

BDC have approved plans to initiate a review of the MMF formula which will be implemented from 2026.

- Pressure on the leadership of change

BDC have noted that, in communities and churches experiencing change, leadership, while vital, is profoundly challenging. Identifying, commissioning, resourcing and supporting key leaders at church, parish, benefice, deanery and diocesan level is vital.

- Consultation on the use of diocesan assets

BDC have approved a proposal for consultation across the diocese and which we expect to come to Diocesan Synod as part of the budget process in November. The proposal is to review the Board of Finance’s approach to reserves with the intention of releasing additional assets to support parish ministry. The proposals are only possible following the work of On the Way towards fruitfulness and sustainability at parish and deanery level.

2. Governance

- Review of governance

Following a significant review that reported in May 2020 the BDC and Diocesan Synod implemented a number of significant changes at the end of that year and into 2021. In 2022 BDC reviewed the implementation of those changes noting that the vast majority had been implemented successfully, but that there was a need for further steps, including changes to the diocesan website and the operation of the management committees. These changes are being implemented.

- Mission and Pastoral Committee

In reviewing the effectiveness of the 2020/21 changes it was noted that the operation of the Archdeaconry Mission and Pastoral Committees had been left untouched but that further work would now be useful. In consultation with the Church Commissioners team that work with dioceses on the Mission and Pastoral Measure new arrangements were introduced in late 2022 and are now in operation. While the BDC remains the statutory Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, a new committee chaired by a retired diocesan Chancellor, judge and KC has been formed to improve the Board's scrutiny of proposals made under the Measure.

- Church House

BDC have given "in principle" approval for plans to relocate Church House to smaller accommodation in the Old Cathedral School adjacent to the cathedral.

3. Diocesan and national support for parishes facing the energy costs crisis

BDC approved measures to support parishes, clergy and lay staff facing rapidly escalating energy cost inflation in late 2022 and parishes and other groups wanting to offer community based projects such as "warm spaces".

PCC energy grants of almost £470,000 were made to 200 PCCs, 26 energy mission grants totalling £110,000 were made to 26 parishes, clergy and lay staff received grants totalling £78,000

These grants were funded by a combination of national support from the Archbishops Council and the Board's own resources.

4. Safeguarding

- The Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor and Head of Safeguarding Sarah Acraman left us at the end of March 2023, in her 13 years of dedicated service she helped us to make the church in Cornwall a safer place, we are enormously grateful to her for that generous and wise service, we wish her every blessing as she takes up a role with the National Safeguarding Team.

Following an open recruitment process we have appointed Andy Earl as Head of Safeguarding.

5. Education

- The Diocesan Director of Education, Katie Fitzsimmons, has been appointed DDE for the Diocese of Salisbury from 1st September. We are very sad to see Katie go she brought a new, refreshing and much needed approach to the role in a time that may well have been the most challenging for schools in generations, she hasn't gone yet so there will be plenty of chances to further embarrass her.