

Report from the Bishops Diocesan Council to Diocesan Synod

February 2026



This report is produced by officers on behalf of the Bishops Diocesan Council (BDC) and is addressed to members of Diocesan Synod. It covers activity between October 2025 - January 2026.

1. Fruitfulness and Sustainability - Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal

Having approved the Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal in 2023 the BDC receive regular reports on progress towards its implementation. Direct oversight of the plan is through the Board for Change and Renewal, which meets regularly and reports to BDC.

1.1 Overall progress

Ruth Marriott, Director of Change & Renewal, provided reports summarising progress towards the strategic objectives of Fruitfulness and Sustainability as detailed in the Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal. She emphasised that this work is about implementing change and in some areas it will take considerable time to see significant progress against objectives, for example in the work with children and young people and to develop sustainable and effective models of ministry in sparse rural areas of the diocese.

Key points reported:

- All deaneries now have a Strategic Rural Dean identified (we know that good leadership is crucial).
- Progress in deaneries towards implementing their plans continues but remains patchy, with some making good progress whilst in others progress is slower. In three deaneries plans are subject to significant review. Common factors where progress overall is slower than hoped for include clergy turnover, and difficulties in recruiting to key lay roles.
- Whilst overall contribution rates for MMF are good this is still not universally the case, including in a couple of deaneries in receipt of significant LICF and Mission Funding, Ruth was asked to report on this at a future Council meeting.

BDC noted that all of these positive signs will need work and commitment to sustain them.

A review of Transforming Mission is currently underway and will report in the early spring.

1.2 People planning

Work continues to implement the priorities of the People Plan which initially focus on:

- incumbent status clergy (including oversight ministers)
- local leaders (as in focal ministry)
- deanery leaders (usually the strategic rural dean)
- children and young people workers (paid and volunteering)

The key operational priority continues to be to maintain and grow the level of stipendiary clergy in post, initially to the level described in the Diocesan Plan. The headline stipendiary headcount at the end of November fell to 58 (from a high of 63 in the spring and summer) and at the end of January stands at 60. Five further appointments have been made but with clergy not yet on “payroll,” and four more stipendiary posts are to be advertised before Easter.

Looking further into 2026 and beyond, BDC will continue to bring forward and support plans to maintain and nudge-up stipendiary numbers, but for several reasons this is going to become increasingly difficult over time. The main and potentially overwhelming headwind comes from the reducing number of stipendiary clergy nationally. Even if vocations suddenly recover next year (there is no sign of this) the long pipeline from vocation to incumbent (at least six years) and the high number of retirements will mean much lower numbers of deployable clergy in the medium term.

There are at least two other potentially significant “headwinds” in the medium term. One is that national interventions are tending to close down some of our opportunities for making Truro a “diocese of choice” for stipendiary clergy, for instance the national stipend, and moves towards common detailed terms and conditions for clergy. The second potentially significant medium-term headwind will arrive towards the end of the decade when we are likely to find ourselves in the midst of a sudden peak in clergy turnover corresponding to the peak we have just come out of - in other words, many of the clergy that we have just appointed will be looking to move at the same time.

The BDC spent its annual away day considering the medium to long-term trends in clergy vocations, seeking to explore what this might mean for the diocese, and what further action is required. The work from this day will feed into the pending ministry strategy that the new Bishop of St Germans will create, once in post.

Several deanery plans, and our proposals to support the work of Strategic Rural Deans, include “House for Duty” clergy. We have noted previously that recruiting to this type of role is difficult, this observation reflects the national picture. With this in mind we are planning to look at work to encourage recruitment to these posts specifically.

We currently have 21 commissioned lay Local Leaders across the diocese, alongside at least 14 ordained Local Leaders (these are self-supporting ordained ministers and clergy with Permission to Officiate). Sens Kernewek, which includes direct input from the bishop, remains our primary formation pathway for lay Local Leaders. The next cohort begins in January 2026 with 18 participants, and work is underway to establish local, deanery-based delivery with Strategic Rural Deans and Oversight Ministers to widen access. Planning is also taking place for the first cohort of the Elizabeth Pathway in September 2026 for those exploring ordained Local Leadership. [[Link to info on Elizabeth Pathway](#)]

1.3 Children, young people and families - Growing Younger

Work to implement our plans to grow ministry among children, young people and families continues and is beginning to increase in capacity. The Growing Younger lead officer is now in place and works in the Ministry Team.

Episcopal College have identified 7 priorities for 2026:

- Embed the five foundations found in the Growing Younger strategy.
- Launch 'small grants' process for 'Many' workstream.
- Develop resources, signposting and partnerships.
- Support existing 'Flourish' locations ('Some' workstream).
- Identify existing children, young people and families work that can and should be supported.
- Identify at least the first of the 'few' locations.
- Further work on background planning; Diocesan Plan, Ministry Strategy, People Plan, reviews to the use of Mission Funding etc.

The BDC agreed to delay our bid for national funding support (up to £8m). The main reason for this is capacity in the senior leadership team - it is expected that the new Bishop of St Germans will lead the bid development, and because we need to make sure that projects supported by large scale investment are properly "owned" and rooted in the life of the church locally. The national expectations for the bid will be tight, but we don't want to make a bid based only on what the national team are looking for.

The BDC were keen to understand if the new Archdeacon of Bodmin will continue holding the portfolio of intergenerational church. It was confirmed that the Growing Younger strategy requires a revision of senior role responsibilities but that intergenerational church is still key.

The BDC also asked if the Flourish pilot work will be rolled out to more schools and it was confirmed that it will, as it is proving very effective, particularly important with secondary schools, none of which other than Five Islands on the Isles of Scilly are church schools.

1.4 Church buildings

The BDC were presented with a draft list of 'options' of what could be included in the church buildings strategy, based on extensive research and consultation and recommended by the Church Buildings Advisory Group (made up of clergy, churchwardens, architects, surveyors, DAC members, buildings team staff and relevant partner organisations). This list of options, supported in principle by the BDC, is to be used to consult with Diocesan Synod in February 2026, along with the proposed goals and strategic priorities of the strategy, prior to a complete strategy being presented to the BDC for approval in April 2026.

1.5 Environment

In May 2024 the DBF were awarded a grant of £58,850 to create and administer a "Quick Wins" small grants programme to support work towards Carbon Net Zero in churches, this programme [\[LINK\]](#) has proven very popular and effective with parishes.

We have now been awarded a further £90,700 to be paid in three equal annual instalments for 2026, 2027, and 2028.

This is in addition to the grants already awarded for staffing and minor repairs and improvement grants in previous years.

2. Safeguarding

2.1 Safeguarding audit recommendations

The BDC received a report on progress towards implementing the recommendations made following the audit by INEQE in 2024. To date this is summarised as:

11	Recommendation implemented and signed off by DSSP or DSSP Chair
9	Recommendation implemented. Awaiting sign off by DSSP or DSSP Chair
8	Recommendation partially implemented
3	Recommendation not yet implemented
3	Relates to NST

Note: DSSP = Diocesan Safeguarding Scrutiny Panel. NST = National safeguarding team

The BDC noted the progress and the detail regarding items still red - not implemented. These tasks are one that requires parishes to carry out surveys about safeguarding; for the diocesan team to carry out training needs analysis at a local level; and for an enhanced training evaluation system to be implemented.

The BDC discussed the provision of safeguarding training and the decision making around what meets the threshold for a safeguarding ‘case’.

3. Finance

3.1 Management Accounts

The following items were highlighted to the BDC:

- £275k received in MMF in December. The 2025 total MMF contribution is slightly higher than in 2024 but with inflation either flat or a reduction in real terms.
- The new members of the Finance, Assets and Risk Committee (FAR), both accountants, are bedding in and are on a steep learning curve but are already making a positive contribution.
- The initial stages of the 2025 DBF audit are in hand.

3.2 Mid-long term planning

Members of the BDC are concerned regarding the multiple “cliff edges” which are set to arise in 2027 in particular, and further out, as transitional funding to support the gap between budgeted income and MMF grows. This is to be addressed more fully later in the year when the draft 2027 budget is considered with the 2025 full year accounts and updated expectations for 2026 emerge.

4. St Paul’s Church, Truro

We still await the publication of the Commissioners’ “Statement of Reasons” for their decision to agree the proposed Scheme for the demolition of St Paul’s Church, the delay is not yet causing problems but we do need to know if there is anything in the detail of the final decision that may impact our next steps.

We have received funding for, and have commissioned, a feasibility study to support a decision on the future of the site, the report will help us to understand if almshouses are indeed a credible option and may help us to seek additional funding (i.e. a benefactor for the establishment of almshouses). Currently indicative plans for the site are being developed by an architect to help decision making.

We continue to communicate with local neighbours and relevant partners about progress.

5. Governance

5.1 Membership

Revd Teresa Folland has resigned as a Bishop's Nominee on the BDC and as a member of FAR. We will be advertising for a replacement member of the clergy to join FAR. Bishop David is currently reviewing the skills and experience on the BDC to consider further nominations under Standing Order XB41(o).

Mike Sturgess was elected as a lay representative of Bodmin Archdeaconry for the BDC.

Revd Elizabeth Burke and Simon Taurins were selected from the membership of the BDC to join the Programme Board for Change & Renewal, as per that bodies terms of reference.