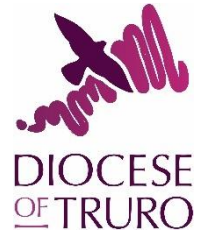


Report from the Bishops Diocesan Council to Diocesan Synod

May 2026



This report is produced by Kate Cortez on behalf of the Bishops Diocesan Council (BDC) and is addressed to members of Diocesan Synod. It covers activity between February 2026 - April 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.

Key points reported:

- The team is currently focussing on working with deaneries to review their plans to ensure they are fruitful and sustainable; this will be completed by November 2026. This along with the Ministry Strategy, will enable a review of the Diocesan plan for Change and Renewal by the New Year. Most plans will only have minor changes, but some will need more change.
- Current RAG rating of deaneries for progress: 6 Green, 3 Amber, 3 Red.
- 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.
- Pace of change has been determined largely by the (i) the number of clergy in post - now only 1 priest left to recruit to in current plans, (ii) ensuring sufficient strategic leadership in the deanery - all 12 deaneries have Strategic Rural Deans to help lead change and culture. We would expect to see change happen more quickly now as these key foundations are in place.
- MMF contribution rates for 96% of call for 2025 was seen a positive and support for the deanery plans.
- Reduced capacity in Episcopal College has impacted upon progress towards Growing Younger and wider strategy but with the arrival of the new Suffragan and Archdeacon this is expected to improve from Q3. However, progress on Growing Younger is moving quickly with the 'Many' training in place for 'Launchpad' to support clergy; 'Many' grant process to be launched this month; Flourish#1 pilot sites making significant progress with strong partnerships with Multi Academy Trusts; and Flourish#2 sites identified; 'Few' process due to be signed off by BDC in June.

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

A review of Transforming Mission is completed and will report to the BDC in June.

1.1.1 Review of Lower Income Communities Funding and Mission Funding

This review was instigated by BDC to determine if the Lowest Income Communities Funding (LICF) and Mission Funding (MF) are being used effectively by deaneries and to consider where adjustments need to be made to ensure funding in both streams is still aligned with the original goals of the Deanery Plans and with the Diocesan strategic objectives for Diocesan Plan for Change & Renewal (DPC&R).

Key findings:

1. The use of the funds is still aligned with fruitfulness and sustainability but it is taking longer than expected and finances for parishes are a mixed picture (see points above re pace of change). Some places are seeing growth, but many parishes are in very rural settings and struggling both in terms of fruitfulness and sustainability. There is a risk that as we emphasise more the ability to use LICF funds to support the gap in MMF from 2026 we see less innovative community interventions.
2. More work is required to gather more evidence about whether funding is being used efficiently and effectively, including the need for more qualitative data which tells more of the story. We have a process in place through our Shared Outcomes Framework to better demonstrate numbers and stories.
3. There are signs of under-use of Mission Funding in 3 deaneries, hence the need for significant revision of some plans.
4. MMF contributions are yet to reach above 2019 levels, for a myriad of factors including leadership churn, as well as world events which have impacted (Ukraine War and Cost of Living Increase) which will need to be considered when the Assets Strategy is reviewed in 2027 for the 2028 budget.

Key recommendations:

1. There is a need for EC to have a conversation about how and when the aspiration to increase stipendiary clergy numbers can happen, balanced against the need to improve financial sustainability.
2. Financial sustainability is a three way partnership between deanery, diocese and church commissioners and if one does not meet its expected contributions this will affect the ability of the other two areas to do so. Where possible, guidance should be created to clarify this position.
3. Deanery Annual Reviews should continue to ensure they are fit for purpose and actioning intended MF plans effectively.
4. Diocese should revise financial assumptions for sustainability across the diocese (i.e. is the assets strategy affordable) and 2030 end date for Diocesan Plan should be extended to 2034 to reflect slower start.

1.2 People planning

Isaac McNish presented an updated version of the People Plan which focuses on

- incumbent status clergy (including oversight ministers)
- local leaders (as in focal ministry)
- churchwardens
- children and young people leaders (paid and volunteering)

This review has updated the priority groups, swapping in churchwardens in the place of Strategic Rural Deans (SRDS). SRDS remain a vital role in the diocese and the People Plan but with 12 in post it was felt that churchwardens are now more of a priority in terms of live risk and need for active intervention.

The primary 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 April was 60 with only 2 stipendiary vacancies in the diocese and two appointments made in April.

The BDC continues to support plans to maintain and nudge-up stipendiary numbers, challenging officers to ensure progress. As previously noted in reports, the national clergy pipeline continues to shrink but we continue to be able to recruit to the roles we have available. As yet there is no indication nationally that there is a pending recovery in vocations. However, our current vacancy rate is very low, lower than it has been since well before Covid and testament to significant efforts by the Church House team and senior clergy and reflecting a much reduced 'turnover'. This year 2 stipendiary clergy are being Priested, and 4 stipendiary and 7 Self Supporting clergy are being deaconed at Petertide.

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 current cohort has 8 participants,

1.3 Church buildings

The BDC approved the strategy, in which the main priorities and actions were unchanged from what was presented to Diocesan Synod in February (other than amendments and inclusions recommended by Synod members).

A summary of the strategy will be provided with the papers for May Synod. A full copy of the strategy is available upon request: kate.cortez@truodiocese.org.uk

The next step is to create a delivery plan for the strategy.

The DBF was awarded a grant of £118,436 in March to pay 75% of the cost of our existing Church Buildings Support officer for another 3 years. This has been factored into the budget agreed by the BDC for the strategy.

2. Safeguarding

2.1 Independent scrutiny

The BDC received a report from the Independent Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Scrutiny Panel (DSSP) which provided:

- An overview of safeguarding activity across the Diocese and Cathedral.
- Evidence of how DSSP has scrutinised safeguarding arrangements in alignment

- with the National Safeguarding Standards.
- Assurance on alignment with national learning and expectations.
- Clear identification of risks requiring BDC oversight.

Key risks and challenges identified:

1. Data quality - MyConcern Case Management System limitations undermine assurance, trend analysis and risk visibility.
2. Diocesan Safeguarding Team capacity - Rising referrals and hundreds of routine queries risk overwhelming the team.
3. Parish variability - Dashboard literacy, safer recruitment and governance confidence remain uneven.
4. Leadership culture - Clergy fragility and psychological safety concerns may impair safeguarding vigilance.
5. Victim/Survivor Engagement - Requires consistent leadership visibility and structural support to build trust.

Key strengths identified:

1. Compliance with training, DBS and the safeguarding dashboard continues to improve.
2. Referrals in year increased from 179 to 270 over 85 locations indicating reporting confidence.
3. Truro has been recognised nationally for work on safety plans.
4. The survivor voice is embedded across all areas of work in safeguarding.

2.2 Charity Commission expectations of the Church of England including parishes and dioceses

The BDC were given an overview of the current context regarding the Charity Commission and its expectations of the Church, including the trustees of the Diocesan Board of Finance (the BDC). Andy Earl, Diocesan Safeguarding officer, asked the members to review the '10 actions trustee boards need to ensure good safeguarding governance' and a number of recommendations were identified.

There is more work to be done in this area as the national church is still working with the Charity Commission to clarify responsibilities at each level of diocesan governance. In the meantime, the Church House team will be reviewing procedures and policy to ensure it is fully compliant with the expectations of the Commission.

3. Finance

3.1 Management Accounts and Annual Report

The following items were highlighted to the BDC:

- The draft out-turn for 2025 to the February meeting, and then the Annual Report and accounts were presented by the Auditor, alongside the Audit Findings Report and the Going Concern Report in April.
- Income for Q1 is £52k lower than budget, due to MMF income being £70k below budget, partially offset by external income being higher.
- Expenditure for Q1 is £345k (12.6%) lower than budget, the main reasons being a lower spend on property works and £210k less than budgeted for grants paid to deaneries (£100k for LICF, £57k Mission Fundings and £52k Growing Younger) - these are all items where expenditure is expected to 'catch up' over the year.

- The Q1 reforecast budget was approved, carrying over an underspend on net zero works on properties from 2025 and underspends from Q1 also being carried forward.

4. Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Justice (EDIJ)

The BDC were presented with an update from the EDIJ Committee including progress towards the plan which has focussed on:

1. How churches might better engage with the Gypsy Roma Traveller community.
2. How we might use the 'Difference' model to engage with contested heritage.
3. The appointment of a Dean of Women's Ministry.
4. How EDIJ can be embedded in Growing Younger.

Key recommendations:

1. Deliver a programme of training for Diocesan Synod, the BDC, Episcopal College and Church House staff.
2. Require consideration of EDIJ in governance reports.

5. Governance

5.1 Chairs review of Risk

Justin Day, the Chair of the TDBF, led a review of risk management by the organisation (recommendation from the 2024 Governance review). The report was shared, with recommendations.

Key findings:

1. Overall management of risk is strong, and this is supported by feedback from a variety of stakeholders and other evidence.
2. The trustees (the BDC) need to engage more directly with the risk registers to support their role in risk management.
3. More training and communication is needed for members of boards and committees, and more junior staff around risk management including appetite for risk.

Key recommendations:

1. To review the format of the strategic risk register and present it to the BDC biannually (currently it is only seen by the Finance, Assets and Risk Committee).
2. Implement a wider programme of training and development for committee members and staff around risk management, including risk appetite.

The full report can be provided upon request: kate.cortez@trurodiocese.org.uk

5.2 Church House Annual Plan

The BDC received a report on progress against the 2025 plan and a copy of the 2026 plan.