

Overview of 145th meeting of the Diocesan Synod Cliff College, Calver, Hope Valley, Derbyshire, S32 3XG

Saturday, 15 March 2025 at 9.30am



The Chair of the House of Laity, Peter Kelsey, chaired the first half of the Synod with Revd Dr Nicola McNally, Bishop's Council member, chairing the second half. The main agenda items were:

Bishop Libby's Presidential Address
Future of Church England safeguarding
Diocesan strategic planning
Planning for financial Sustainability

Presidential Address

Bishop Libby opened her Presidential Address welcoming everyone and asked all to contemplate the Ash Wednesday liturgy:

***Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.
Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ.***

Bishop Libby shared that, whilst the Synod was an opportunity to gather, consider, discuss, decide and advise, we should remind ourselves that we are but dust and ashes, dependent on God from our beginning to our end. And that the only honest response to the failures of world, nation, church is repentance, knowing we fall short and casting ourselves on the mercy of Christ.

This year, Bishop Libby had a very different start to Lent than usual enabling her to recall that being dust is not only that we are fallen but that we are connected and created and may see God's glory in our humanness as well as failing.

She further reflected that we, the world, the nation, the church, our churches, and each of us, need to be reminded that we are but dust and ashes, dependent on God from our beginning to our end. And that the only honest response to the failures of world, nation, church is repentance, casting ourselves on the mercy of Christ. But we also need to know that in all our dustiness there are reflections of God's glory and that in Christ our fallen creatureliness is recreated – and the One who calls is faithful.

Safeguarding

Synod welcomed Lisa Marriott (Head of Safeguarding), Gemma Barber (Regional Safeguarding Lead with the National Safeguarding Team), and Julie Gardner (Independent Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP)) to share updates following the Makin Review and February's General Synod.

This session covered many aspects of Safeguarding and recent changes. It included sections from all three presenters:

Lisa introduced the Diocesan Safeguarding Team and the team's priorities for the year ahead, including transferring DBS processing to an external provider and developing a feedback protocol. Gemma guided synod members through the Future of Church Safeguarding. Julie introduced DSAP in Derby and what the future will look like.

As this was the first Diocesan Synod meeting held since the recent General Synod, details were shared on bringing independent scrutiny to safeguarding in the Church of England whilst committing to further work to enable greater independence in the short term:

- General Synod approved Model 3, which is to set up an external scrutiny body. The body will perform various scrutiny, audit and review functions.
- Most functions currently delivered by the NST, except policy development, will be transferred to an external employer.
- Further work is necessary to implement Model 4, which is full independent delivery involving the transfer of safeguarding teams in dioceses and cathedrals to the same external employer as the NST.

None of these big structural changes will happen immediately. Work on structural reorganisation cannot happen until a great deal of detailed policy development is complete, and legislative processes are implemented where required. There are proper processes to follow. Legislative processes are expected to involve at least three General Synod groups of sessions from 2026 to 2028. It is expected that full external delivery implementation will be in place by December 2028.

There was also an insight into the national Makin review and the learning for the diocesan safeguarding team. Synod took great reassurance from this session as to the quality and robustness of the safeguarding provision in this diocese.

Diocesan Strategic Planning

Sam Frith (Strategy Lead in the Parish Support Office) invited Synod members to be part of creating strategies to equip and enable churches, schools, and individual Christians to Deepen Relationships with God, Serve Local Contexts, Challenge Injustice, and Make New Disciples.

Almost 50 ideas were contributed by Synod members, along with useful feedback and critique of the rough plans that were presented as part of this activity. This feedback will shape the emerging strategies for each of the diocesan outcomes, while also helping us to consider how we can become Younger, More Diverse, Greener, and with more presence and impact in Contexts of Socio-economic Deprivation.

Planning for Financial Sustainability

Will Hagger (Diocesan Secretary) and Martyn Marples (Director of Finance and Operations) took Synod members through a proposal to sustain our clergy and Derby Diocesan Board of Finance (DDBF) staff people resources until at least the end of 2027 despite growing budget deficits.

Martyn shared the diocesan financial context, including how the DDBF has enhanced income by reviewing the management of its financial investments and adopting a Total Return investment strategy, and by taking advantage of grant opportunities from the National Church Institutions (NCIs) wherever possible. The DDBF is also continually looking to reduce expenditure – it has rationalised and restructured staffing saving over £200k from the annual budget and has been budgeting from a ‘zero base’. However, Martyn cautioned Synod members that these gains have been negated by the continued decline in Common Fund giving – the means by which stipendiary ministry is provided for every parish and chaplaincy across the diocese – combined with high inflation. The deficit on our unrestricted General Fund (through which most of our operating activities flow) is forecast to grow to over £1 million by 2029 (and without further intervention rises to nearly £1.8 million when funds designated for specific purposes and funds restricted for property improvements are included). Against this, Martyn explained that we are waiting to learn of the outcome of changes in financial flows between the NCIs and dioceses for the next triennium, and possibly beyond which it is hoped may provide some short-term breathing space.

Will then explained how cutting resources now to balance the budget would materially harm the delivery of our strategic outcomes as we are just embarking on the implementation of our strategic programme.

The following motion, proposed by Peter Kelsey, was then debated:

“This Synod is committed to an investment in transformation, to see signs of missional growth and improving financial health across the diocese as we start to implement the strategic programmes to deliver the Diocesan Vision, Outcomes and Priorities as approved by this Synod.

Therefore, this Synod:

- 1. Commits to sustaining the current (2025) agreed levels of diocesan people resourcing until the end of 2027, to include paid clergy and DBF staff resources and DBF financial support for the DBE (which supports the DBE’s people resourcing);*

2. *Commits to back this medium-term financial strategy with investment of up to £2 million from unrestricted general reserves, though funding deficit budgets over the period 2025-27;*
3. *Acknowledges that this strategy will need to be reviewed should it seem likely that more than £2 million of investment in funding for deficit budgets would be required over the period 2025-27, in order that we protect the organisation;*
4. *Asks Bishop's Council to work with officers of the DDBF to deliver these objectives; and*
5. *Calls on all parishes in the Diocese to be as generous as they can with Common Fund contributions over the period 2025-27 to support this strategy and the goal of filling clergy vacancies."*

A vote was held with Synod resoundingly supporting the proposal to sustain resources through funding up to £2 million of General Fund deficits until the end of 2027, whilst calling on parishes to be as generous as they can with Common Fund to support this strategy and the goal of filling clergy vacancies.

Our next Synod

Our next Diocesan Synod will be held on Saturday, 14 June 2025.