

 **Agenda item 2**

**Minutes of a Session of the Bath and Wells Diocesan Synod, held at Flourish House, Wells,**

**on Wednesday 13 July 2022 at 6:30 pm**

The session opened with Dwelling in the Word, led by Mary Masters and The Revd Rob Eastwood Dewing, followed by an opening prayer led by The Revd Jonathan Lloyd.

**Dr Caroline Mason, Chair of the House of Laity, in the Chair**

Synod received a video message from Bishop Michael, who was looking forward to arriving in the Diocese and to getting to know us, which he hoped to do from August onwards.

Bishop Michael had received a Charge from the Archbishop of Canterbury, which was available on the website. His installation would take place in Wells Cathedral on Saturday 12th November at 3.00pm. Bishop Michael thanked Bishop Ruth, the Archdeacons, the Diocesan Team and members of Synod, for their support during the vacancy, and re-iterated the words of the Apostle Paul “I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.”

1. **Presidential Address**

[diocesan-synod-presidential-address-july-2022.docx (live.com)](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fd3hgrlq6yacptf.cloudfront.net%2F60638a2c87045%2Fcontent%2Fpages%2Fdocuments%2Fdiocesan-synod-presidential-address-july-2022.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)

Bishop Ruth highlighted that whilst some people warm to new possibilities and enjoy the prospect of the unknown, many of us struggle with change and transition. These last few years had been particularly hard, therefore, with the amount of change we had had to handle within the world and in the Church.

The recent General Synod had debated Ukraine; assisted suicide; carbon net zero ambitions; and the concerning issue of pornography and its accessibility to children and young people. General Synod had also looked at the shape of the Church and how it needs to address greater inclusivity, particularly in relation to disabled people and youth; how we fund ministry training; and how we are doing in relation to our safeguarding objectives.

On July 26th the Lambeth Conference would begin. Its theme would be ‘God’s Church for God’s World’, and over 650 Bishops from across the Anglican Communion would meet to explore what it means for us to respond to the needs of a 21st century world.

Four Zambian Bishops would be visiting Bath and Wells before the Conference, and there would be opportunities to connect with them, including on Zambia Sunday, 24th July.

We may feel this present heat is rather more than we can bear, but what implications does the changing climate have in other parts of our world? Our Zambian sisters and brothers could share much about the experience of damaging climate change.

Bishop Ruth referred to the Charge given to Bishop Michael by Archbishop Justin, which had particular significance as we are reminded again of the importance of building a safer world for all.

The Charge included *“In the midst of much fear and uncertainty, may you encourage the diocese to be courageous in the gospel as the first disciples were, confident in their witness as St Paul was, bold in their hopes and faith-filled in their dreams of joining in God’s work to make the Kingdom of Heaven known here on Earth.”*

*“…. scripture calls us to ‘speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and for the rights of all who are vulnerable’ [Prov 31:8], to challenge cultures of hierarchy and deference, and create a space that honours the trust and hope that people place in the church of God. You are called to be a seeker and speaker of truth and justice and ensure that the Diocese of Bath and Wells is a place where children and vulnerable adults are safe, and the highest standards of safeguarding are upheld.”*

Archbishop Justin’s words called Bishop Michael to encourage each of us to be courageous, confident, and bold in sharing the good news of Christ and in building the kingdom of God.

On a personal note, Bishop Ruth thanked all of us for our care, support and prayer in the last two years. She would be taking some sabbatical leave from November 14th for a couple of months, with some further leave deferred until after Easter. Bishop Ruth also thanked Rosemary Pearce who would shortly be leaving her role as Interim Diocesan Secretary.

1. **Minutes**

The Synod resolved that the minutes of the session held on 19 March 2022 be approved as a correct record.

1. **Matters arising from the minutes**

None

1. **Bishop’s Council Minutes**

The Synod resolved that the minutes of the meetings of Bishop’s Council held on 27 April 2022 and 14 June 2022, be noted.

The Diocesan Registrar drew attention to the terms of the Bishop’s Instrument of Delegation as approved by Bishop’s Council on 14th June (minute no. 18, pages 5 and 6 of those minutes).

1. **Questions**

Two questions had been received. A copy of the questions and replies are attached to these minutes as an appendix.

1. **Safeguarding**

The Chair welcomed Ben Goodhind, Diocesan Safeguarding Manager, who gave a brief overview of the work of Safeguarding in the Diocese.

The Safeguarding Team provide safeguarding support, training, and advice to parishes, and to the Cathedral under a memorandum of understanding. That support included telephone and email advice including managing safeguarding allegations against clergy and church officers. The team liaise with police, probation and social services about the attendance at church of known violent or sexual offenders, and assist parishes with supervising that attendance. The team also provide oversight of the DBS checks process for volunteers and staff, and processes DBS checks for clergy and readers (1000 DBS checks per year).

The team are also responsible for providing training as required by Church of England Learning and Development Policy (120 face to face or virtual training courses per year). A range of online training is available including Basic Awareness, Foundation, Safer Recruitment and Domestic Abuse Awareness. Training is provided for people to deliver the online content in person where required.

On average, the team manages around 55 open safeguarding cases at any time as well as receiving several hundred miscellaneous safeguarding calls per year.

The 10 key aims of the safeguarding team for 2022 are as follows:

1. To restart face to face delivery of training and offer support for parishes struggling with online training to deliver this face to face. To evaluate and develop our training and support for our trainers to meet best practice and improve our retention of staff.
2. Equip our Parish Safeguarding Officers with the tools to thrive in their work and the support required to feel confident and positive.
3. To work with our communications team to ensure we use a variety of communication methods to highlight the importance of safeguarding and ensure people are informed and supported with knowledge and information. To also modernise our website ensuring it is visually interesting and easy to use.
4. To set up working groups reaching out across departments and agencies to tackle the four key areas of our PCR2(Past Cases Review 2) action plan. This is to include a full review of all victim services.
5. To improve consistency in casework, ensuring all cases have Risk assessments, Risk Management Plans and Safeguarding Agreements.
6. To prioritise management of 8 existing core group cases to a satisfactory conclusion.
7. To support the Cathedral with delivering on the SCIE Audit recommendations.
8. To support the Diocese in developing Healthy Cultures. This would include working more closely across departments and ensuring safeguarding and theology are more closely entwined.
9. To develop and deliver a robust and proactive policy to increase awareness of Domestic Abuse and to ensure we promote safe respectful communities.
10. To evaluate the roles and areas of work within the safeguarding team to ensure they provide best value for money and reflect our priorities.

Past Cases Review 2 had been a challenging process for all Dioceses. Bath and Wells had re-visited many historic concerns, had reached out to large numbers of victims, and had tried to use the process to develop and inform our practice. Whilst no major new cases had been identified, there had been a lot of learning.

The key themes for the diocese from PCR 2 were:

1. The need to substantially improving filing. Many clergy had several files in different locations often making it easy for things to be missed.

2. The need to make to easier to report safeguarding concerns. We are working with our parishes and cathedral to ensure up to date and informative posters make it very clear how to report concerns.

3. The need to improve multi-agency work with statutory services such as the Police. Here we are reaching out to other agencies utilising our contacts to ensure other agencies share information appropriately.

4. Delivering better outcomes for victims. It was intended to launch a 12-month review of victim services, including reaching out to survivors and professionals to try and identify innovative ways of supporting people who have been impacted by safeguarding failures within the church.

The delivery of safeguarding was achievable due to the dedication and hard work of our Parish Safeguarding Officers supported by a skilled staff from a diverse range of backgrounds.

Synod reflected in groups on role of parish safeguarding officers and how they can best be supported:

• What are the challenges faced by Parish Safeguarding Officers?

• How can PSOs best be supported by PCCs and by the Diocese to meet those challenges?

• What can we do to encourage people to serve as PSOs?

A summary of feedback received from discussion groups is attached as an appendix to these minutes.

The session included a reflection from The Revd Dr Ed Moll on “Safer Leadership”, including the use of power and authority in the church. The culture of leadership in which power and authority are exercised was important including:

* Literacy-recognise the issue
* Transparency-what are the lines of accountability, including informal meetings?
* Agency-“see something, say something”

Pastoral authority is a gift to the church. Leaders may sin and make mistakes. Honesty is the opportunity to go back across the line.

**7. Briefing on July General Synod Sessions**

The Revd Jo Stobart and The Ven Dr Adrian Youings briefed Synod on the recent General Synod Session including the importance of including disabled people fully in the life of the church; age verification for pornography. The February Synod would consider LLF.

**8. Date of next meeting**

29th October 2022 at 9.30 am (subsequently changed to 26th November)

**The meeting ended at 8.25 pm.**

 **Appendix A**

**1. Question to Ian Theodoreson, DBF Chair from The Revd Liz Dudley, Frome Deanery**

*“When selling assets, in particular land, how is the Diocese ensuring that local missional potential and evangelistic opportunities are represented in any discussions or considerations?*

*How confident can the local church be that the Diocese is committed to ensuring that the need to raise revenue is not prioritised over putting mission and evangelism at the heart of all that we do given the poor communication and lack of transparency experienced so far by the parish of St. Marys in Frome.”*

**Reply from Ian Theodoreson:**

*“I’m not aware of the issue around St Mary’s-James Millard will reach out to you.*

*There is a legal requirement to serve notice on the incumbent, the PCC and the churchwardens of any proposed sale of Glebe/Parsonage land under the Church Property Measures. This gives parishes 28 days in which to raise objections or alert us to other issues in relation to the land. In practice we also consult with the relevant archdeacon and the incumbent on an informal basis before proceeding to a sale as they are best placed to inform us of any particular sensitivities, including proposed alternative uses for the land.*

*That’s the process we ought to follow-you can tell us if we don’t.*

*The final decision to sell rests with the Investment Committee, but where we understand there to be particular sensitivities we pass the final proposal to the Diocesan Board of Finance to determine.”*

**2. Question to Axel Palmer, Chair of the Diocesan Housing Committee, from The Revd Dr Stephen M’Caw, Chew Magna Deanery**

*“The pressure on Diocesan finances is no secret – and what might be spent on the upkeep of clergy housing will need to be adjusted according to what financial resources are available. This is exactly as it should be. This question is not about finances but about the transparency of the decisions that are being made.*

*In particular:*

1. *The quinquennial inspection of clergy housing used to generate a report that the occupants were party to. This seems no longer to be the case. Is this now diocesan policy that the occupiers of clergy housing are not offered sight of the quinquennial report?*
2. *Is the maintenance of clergy housing now only being carried out if urgent and is there a freeze on any non-essential maintenance work or upgrading of facilities? If this is the case, how long might this continue?*
3. *If there is a policy in place about which housing stock has priority, or what work is currently permitted, or any other matters, please may Synod be made aware of this?”*

 Reply from Dr Axel Palmer

  **Q1**

*“It remains diocesan policy for clergy occupying diocesan housing to receive a copy of any quinquennial report as required by section 4.4 of* *The Repair of Benefice Buildings Measure 1972.
However due to multiple issues (staff changes, lack of resources and Covid) there is a significant backlog of quinquennial inspections. Currently there are 113 houses within the portfolio which under the Section 4 of the Repair of Benefice Buildings Measure 1972 must have a quinquennial. The property department is small but now has the benefit of two qualified surveyors which means approximately 30 completed reports will be able to be issued in the coming weeks. These properties will be prioritised, and the property team will be putting in place a rolling schedule so that all properties within the entire portfolio will have quinquennial inspection. But there is a need to balance priorities due to significant other tasks at hand, for example, generating superior income from the Glebe Portfolio, Health & Safety management of the portfolio and the Net Zero Carbon 2030 target, so it will take time. “*

*In response to a supplementary question asking if reports of quinquennial inspections can be made available it was stated that this already happens.*

**Q2**

*“As mentioned, the pressures on the DBF’s finances are well known to Synod. These pressures are reflected in property budgetary constraints and the unprecedented increases costs regarding council tax, water rates, (which in 2021 council tax and water rates accounted for £692,922.32 of the total departmental budget of £1,935,545), building materials inflation costs means the property department’s budget in real terms has reduced. This has constrained funds available to undertake reactive and planned maintenance and as such the property department are having to prioritise urgent (to ensure a property remains habitable), statutory repairs and Health and Safety works over non-essential maintenance and improvement works such as new bathroom and kitchens. Regarding the “freeze” on non-essential maintenance / improvement works, it is envisaged this will be in place until the finances of DBF improve, as part of the ‘Five Year Plan’. “*

**Q3**

*“There is no hard policy in place about which housing stock has priority. Each property, and the works required, are assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account several criteria e.g. is the building listed, current state of repair, repair cost, functionality, occupants, environmental/green credentials, location and retention strategy. The property team seek to liaise with the occupants on all works/repairs and actively seek to improve this level of communication.”*

 **Appendix B**

**What are the challenges faced by Parish Safeguarding Officers?**

* Overburdened: volume of work
* Expectations
* Too big a role for one person ie DBS; Training; Safeguarding person
* Perception that all about child protection, so “if we haven’t got children we don’t have to do it!”
* Need help with knowing when and at what level of training everyone needs to do.
* Negativity and apathy towards rules.
* Safeguarding as a block to ministry.
* Knowing who all the people are that should be invited to training
* Paperwork, file keeping
* Regular training and updating for people who can't access online
* Volunteers with too much to do
* A lot of PCC members reluctant to do online training
* Negative response from parishes
* Technical shortfall at parish level
* No volunteers for difficult work
* Administrative burden including chasing reluctant people
* Dealing with cultural differences eg traveller communities
* Lack of awareness
* Keeping up to date with guideline guidance and regulations
* Making safeguarding a positive aspect of parish life
* Overcoming the fear that raising a report against someone will harm them regardless of outcome
* Awareness of chain of confidential reporting
* Knowing boundaries of responsibility of PSO
* Negative attitude towards need for safeguarding; apathy
* Isolation responsibility culture in churches

**How can PSOs best be supported by PCCs and by the Diocese to meet those challenges?**

* Time
* Standing item at every PCC meeting
* Clear guidance as to which training is appropriate for which roles eg churchwardens, leaders of toddler groups LWA or LPA
* Take an interest; recognise the importance
* Support officers and incumbents
* Clear engaging information
* Prayer, ongoing encouragement and support
* PCC need to see the importance and drive the initiative
* Avoid the approach *“we are from head office and we are here to help you”;* ask PCC’s what support they need
* PCC ensuring the PSO doesn't have to chivvy them along - taking responsibility
* Model role descriptions eg churchwardens, toddler groups, luncheon clubs.
* Model risk assessments and basic guidelines
* Monthly forums online for PSO’s
* Support with any issues raised
* How can safeguarding be supportive across denominations
* Safeguarding officer visible
* Confidentiality
* Be more appreciative-offer to help PSO’s
* Recognise this is everyone's responsibility
* Diocesan training
* More guidance on the website so that churchwardens don't have to ask PSO’s what they need to do

**What can we do to encourage people to serve as PSOs?**

* Encourage a culture of safeguarding
* People who can explain the full extent of the role simply ie current PSO’s
* Be positive and enthusiastic about amount of support available e.g. how much easier the dashboard makes the task
* Support them, make sure they know that everything can be easily accessed and training readily available
* Make it fun and soak it in prayer
* Make the task easier
* Tell some positive stories
* Have Ben speak at Deanery Synods