

Diocesan Synod – 15<sup>th</sup> March 2025  
Bishop's Council Report

**6<sup>th</sup> February 2025**

- Bishop Michael welcomed everyone and particularly the Revd Jane Lyon, a new nominated member.
- Opening worship was led by the Revd Preb Ben Whitmore.
- Minutes of the meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> October, and the extra-ordinary meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024 were approved.
- As a matter arising, members noted a previously circulated paper in which Bishop Sarah addressed some questions raised previously by Amanda Robbie about the REVS BMO.
- Bishop Michael gave an update on senior appointments. Archdeacons of Walsall and Salop had been appointed and would be with us in early May. He also reported that an offer of the post of Diocesan Secretary/CEO had been made and accepted. He gave detail of the appointment process and those involved. An announcement was to be made the following week. There were some questions regarding the process and a paper giving details was to be circulated to members prior to the announcement.
- Nick Smeeton gave an update on strategic planning. Firstly, speaking about the proposed amendments to the strategy that would be put before Diocesan Synod at its next meeting which involved one change in language around our growth metric to ensure alignment with national strategy, and also the addition of a tenth goal around net zero carbon. He would also be presenting the strategy document. In the coming weeks three full time posts would be recruited, although he pointed out that the team had reduced by more than four posts. He was excited to report that in order to launch the next stage of our work on the strategy, Bishop Michael was to undertake a ten-day pilgrimage around the diocese from 3<sup>rd</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> April. Each day would have a centrepiece of Bishop Michael leading Bible study around one of our strategic goals.
- Archdeacon Megan gave an update on the progress of the Stoke SMMIB bid project, which was to establish a young adult focussed church near Staffordshire University in Stoke, and to develop 9 new worshipping communities out of partnerships between local schools and churches. The bid had been successful although funding was released in stages. Alex Wolvers had been appointed and had begun work as the Encounter Project Leader and work was ongoing to recruit a leader for the young adult church. Questions were raised around the governance, accountability, reporting and finance of the project.
- Bishop Sarah gave an update on Telford Minister speaking to a previously circulated paper from Laura Lenander, the Interim Leader of the Minster. This gave updates relating to the outcomes set out under the funding of the minster. The information set out was highly encouraging and the minister was achieving its goals. although there were questions to be asked about taking the project forward once its funding ceased. These may need to come to Council for consideration in the future.
- Neil Spiring, the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer, gave an update on current issues. He explained the constitution of the Safeguarding Scrutiny Panel, and the changes that were being made to ensure greater independence in line with IICSA, Past Case Review 2 and the Jay Report. There was a push to move oversight of safeguarding away from the Church, and two proposed models, each giving a different level of independence, were to be discussed by General Synod at its upcoming meeting. He explained both models, and although the direction was towards

independence, the detail of how that would work in practice was not yet known. Bishop Michael added that it was likely that an extra-ordinary meeting of council would be required to consider the response to a letter from the Charity Commission sent to trustees via Diocesan Bishops. This meeting would take place after General Synod's vote on the proposed safeguarding models. Members agreed to this in principle. Following a question from Chris Gill, there was a discussion on resourcing the Safeguarding Team. The Finance Director said that Budget Review Group had looked at this, and following savings in other areas, a further full-time post could be recruited. This was welcomed.

- An item on consultation regarding a new Chair for the DAC was deferred.
- Chris Gill was elected unopposed as Chair of the Vacancy in See Committee.
- The appointment of the secretary of the Vacancy in See Committee was deferred pending the announcement of the new Diocesan Secretary/CEO.
- In their capacity as the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, members noted a Schemes and Orders update, Schemes and Orders completed, and a Suspension and Restriction report.
- An amended constitution of the Closing and Closed Churches Group was approved.
- The Chair of the DBF introduced the finance section of the meeting, including the minutes of the meeting FAM on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2024 and 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2025 which were noted with no questions.
- Write-off applications in respect of Brown Edge, Norton Canes and Wednesbury were approved.
- The Finance Director gave a financial update as at the end of 2024. He explained this was a snapshot, with the 2024 books remaining open until 31<sup>st</sup> January and for Fees until the end of February. The trial balance was showing a deficit of around £1.8 million, and an overall loss of around £2 million for the year. However, revaluations meant an out turn of around £5 million. Common Fund receipts were down around £0.5 million, however 378/448 parish units had paid in full (slightly lower than 2023). For general or unrestricted funds, Common Fund and Fees had been lower, but rental income had been very good. The overall unrestricted deficit was however around the same as the fall in Common Fund receipts.
- Bishop Michael closed the meeting in prayer.

JD February 2025