

**Minutes of a meeting of Lichfield Diocesan Synod  
1<sup>st</sup> July 2025, 6.30 pm, Aldridge Church Centre**

Present:	The Bishop of Lichfield (President) The Bishop of Stafford The Bishop of Wolverhampton 31 clergy members 30 lay members
In attendance:	Mrs Sam Rushton (CEO/Diocesan Secretary) Mr Jonathan Hill (Director of Finance) Mrs Jess Dace (Deputy to the Director of Finance) Mr Mark Davis (Director of Education) The Revd Simon Foster (Mission Team Leader) The Revd Preb Dr Jeanette Hartwell (Director of Ministry) The Revd Canon Nick Smeeton (Strategy Programme Director)
Apologies:	The Bishop of Shrewsbury The Bishop of Oswestry 20 clergy members 21 lay members

*The President assumed the Chair*

### **1. Welcome and Opening Prayers**

The President welcomed everyone, and to their first meeting he particularly welcomed Bishop Anne Hollinghurst, a new Assistant Bishop in the diocese and Principal of the Queen's Foundation, Birmingham; the Ven Liz Jackson, Archdeacon of Walsall; the Ven Nick Watson, Archdeacon of Salop, and Sam Rushton the Diocesan Secretary/CEO.

Opening worship was led by the Bishop of Wolverhampton and the Archdeacon of Walsall.

### **2. Appointment of Secretary**

The President moved that:

*This Synod appoints Mrs Sam Rushton as its Secretary*

This was voted upon and unanimously carried.

### **3. Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising (DS25/07/01)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2025 were approved and signed accordingly.

### **4. Proclamation of Act of Synod (DS25/0702)**

The Registrar proclaimed an Act of Synod relating to the Vacancy in See Committees Regulation 2024 as amended.

### **5. Presidential Address**

Bishop Michael gave his Presidential Address, speaking about the agenda to come, but wished to speak also of other items that had recently been part of the parliamentary business of our country, namely assisted dying and abortion. Legislation around both matters had been discussed recently and would soon be progressing to the House of Lords. He therefore asked for members' prayers for himself and his fellow Lords Spiritual and Temporal. He then spoke about his own concerns, including for the vulnerable, and as a Christian, his belief in the God given sanctity of every human life, resting on the biblical truth that we were made in the image and likeness of our

Creator. To take away God's gift of life, he believed, was to choose to go against the good purposes of our creator. He acknowledged that this raised many complex questions, particularly when applied to the beginning as well as the end of life. At both of these points and at every point in between, he wanted to affirm in wonder and gratitude to God that all human lives, his own and those of his loved ones, belonged to God, and every human life was to be treated with reverence and awe as an image of His glory and a temple of His spirit. For more information see the [story on the diocesan website](#).

*The Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance assumed the Chair*

## **6. Comments from the Chair**

The Chair of the DBF introduced its Annual General Meeting. He spoke about the importance of mutual support and noted that several parishes had given more than their Common Fund request, and 378/445 had paid their request in full. On behalf of the DBF he thanked every parish for every contribution to the Common Fund request. He asked members to take away the message of looking to God for guidance on how we could increase giving and improve on the 2024 collection rate.

## **7. Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024 (DS25/07/03)**

The Finance Director presented the Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 December 2024, copies of which had been circulated. He explained the format of the document and that it was consolidated, including the reports of St Chad's Retreat Centres (SCRC) and Mercian Community Trust (MCT).

The consolidated net movement had shown a surplus of around £7.35m as this included property and investment revaluations which had both increased by around £9.5 m. Therefore, without this there would have been a loss of around £2.3m. This made messaging very difficult.

He noted that both SCRC and MCT had made a surplus.

The presentation went on to illustrate the position of the various funds – Endowment, Restricted, Unrestricted, Designated and General, including the impact of the adoption of Total Return Approach two years ago.

Regarding General Funds, this is the area where there had been a genuine deficit, although there were reasons and plans behind most of it. While income and expenditure had aligned, income had been far lower than budgeted for. Common Fund receipts and fee income had been down, as had investment income, partly due to the necessary selling of some investments. Our target of £2.5 million in sales had also not transpired, and five purchases had been necessary. The beginning of 2025 had been very positive in terms of sales, however. There had also been a drop in expenditure which was somewhat related to the number of vacancies. An analytical exercise had shown that there was no correlation between the decrease in Common Fund receipts and the number of vacancies.

He presented illustrations showing breakdowns of income, costs, deployment, support of missions and ministry and central support.

Overall, he emphasised the Financial Statements were not negative, and reserves and resources were being utilised correctly. Income had been impacted by external factors which were not in our control, but otherwise outcomes had been mostly in line with the budget. He added that funds from Total Return and Resourcing the Future were being purposefully invested into mission and ministry.

He ended by thanking Sam Rushton and Nick Smeeton for their contribution to the Trustees' Annual Report, and Jess Dace for her considerable work on the statements and the audit. He added that much had been learnt in recent months which was translating into changes in the Finance Department, including communication and developing tools and grants to help parishes. He also expressed sincere thanks to all in parishes for their time, talents and tithing.

The Finance Director then moved that:

*The Summary Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Diocesan Board of Finance for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024 be received.*

This was voted upon and unanimously carried.

Dr Michael Davie (Oswestry) asked about the rental of vacant properties, whether this was beneficial for parishes and if any income was made in this way.

The Finance Director answered that benefice houses were more difficult to rent out unless it was known that a vacancy would be particularly long. We were however working with insurance companies who required properties for short term agreements. DBF houses were easier to rent out and so were where appropriate, having been assessed as to the correct course of action in each case. In terms of benefit, rental income helped to relieve pressure on all parishes. Our rental income was currently around £0.75 million per year.

The Revd Neil Robbie (General Synod) thanked the Finance Director and his team for their work on stewarding our finances. Looking at expenditure on Parish Ministry and on Supporting Ministry, he said that in terms of trends, the former was decreasing whilst the latter was increasing (in percentage terms). He felt that it was important that the breakdown of these figures was part of budget setting and it was not a case of "balancing the books" but thinking more widely about how our expenditure followed our strategy.

The Finance Director firstly reminded members that the figures in the accounts were gross, and budgeting would use net figures and for several reasons accounts and budgets were sometimes not comparable. Regarding the budget, it was not a case of trying to "balance books". Discussions were taking place about the 2026 budget, and its preparation was likely to be different to previous years and there had been many changes since zero-based budgeting began in 2022. He therefore felt Neil's points were being addressed.

The Revd Sarah Schofield (Wolverhampton) asked whether non-parochial ministry such as chaplaincies, schools and Fresh Expressions could be illustrated more clearly in the accounts.

The Finance Director answered that this was somewhat easier regarding schools, but chaplaincy was within the deployment budget. This could be broken down in more detail.

The Revd Richard Westwood (Lichfield) asked if there was any way we could assess the potential vulnerability of our income from senior donors in parishes.

The Finance Director answered that there was careful analysis of underlying factors around Common Fund receipts, and statistics including age groups were included. There was an awareness of this issue and its impact on the sustainability of giving, and we continued to work on finding better ways of using data.

## **8. Appointment of Auditors**

The Chair moved that:

*on the recommendation of the Bishop's Council, Hays McIntyre be re-appointed as Auditors until the next AGM, and that the Chairman and Secretary be authorised to determine their remuneration within the budget*

A vote took place, and the motion was unanimously carried.

*The Chair of the House of Clergy assumed the Chair*

## **9. Church of England Proposals for Spending 2026- 2028 (DS25/07/04)**

The Diocesan Secretary spoke to Synod about some national developments and the impact they may have on our diocese. Most importantly, she wanted to ask Synod how we together should look at these issues and make potentially difficult decisions on how to go forward. She emphasised the need for us to face this challenge together as a diocese. She gave a presentation, which had been circulated to members in advance, about the outcomes of the recent Triennium Funding Working Group which made proposals on how Church Commissioners' funding for the national church should be spent over the next three years. The proposals would be put to General Synod the following week and voted upon. In terms of our diocese, the overall impact of the proposals was positive. We would receive an increased LINC allocation, a reduction in the amount to be paid to the national church, and we would also receive transitional support (£1m next year, decreasing over time). However General Synod would also be voting on a stipend increase that could mean an 11.1% increase in our Diocese. Overall, our net gain over 9 years, including the stipend increase would be around £7.8 m. It did present several challenges however which we must, as a whole, respond to. These included managing Common Fund requests, particularly if (as desired) the numbers of vacancies should fall, managing staff salaries in view of a significant rise in stipends (if approved), managing our reserves, and also how to utilise the significantly increased LINC funding. She asked members how they wanted to be involved in the budget setting process and suggested that a series of online meetings be held to enable members to give their input.

Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) asked if we were aware of how other dioceses were dealing with this.

The Diocesan Secretary said that each diocese was different in terms of the issues they faced, and therefore were dealing with this in many different ways.

The Revd Christopher Landau (General Synod) was a new member of General Synod and had attended the presentation about this. He had been struck by the question of how we kept discipleship in the forefront as if many faithful Christians were giving more generously, the picture already discussed would look very different. He was concerned about spiritual complacency given the substantial funds we were to receive.

The Diocesan Secretary reiterated that this issue was for us all collectively. The centre could support discipleship, but it happened in parishes and therefore we needed to hear from parishes about what kind of support was needed.

Mr Tug Wilson (General Synod) asked about the process and timeline for discussions so that the budget could be prepared for the November meeting.

The Diocesan Secretary said that the information had been received a short time ago but reiterated the need for engagement from members and those across the diocese in setting the budget including how to utilise these funds in the best way.

The Revd Oliver Harrison (Tamworth) asked about the figure of over £11,000 per year for housing that was given in the illustration.

The Diocesan Secretary said that she would provide more detail of this outside of the meeting.

The Revd David Sims (Walsall) was keen to engage and suggested some prayer days, possibly archdeaconry based.

The Diocesan Secretary welcomed this idea.

Members were encouraged to contact the Diocesan Secretary with any further comments or questions.

## **11. Shrewsbury AMPC Constitution**

The Archdeacon of Salop spoke to a paper setting out revisions to the constitution of the Shrewsbury Area Mission and Pastoral Committee that required Synod's approval. The revisions reflected the fact that all Archdeacons were now in place.

He then moved that:

*This Synod approves the amended constitution as set out*

This was voted upon and unanimously approved.

## **12. Question Time**

A paper containing all questions submitted with their written answers had been circulated. Several supplementary questions were raised and answered.

In respect of Question 1, Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) asked whether Bishop Michael was aware of a timescale in respect of the theological analysis being led by the Faith & Order Commission (FAOC) which was referred to in his answer.

Bishop Michael said that FAOC's timetable was governed by the House of Bishops timetable. The House of Bishops would be seeking to achieve clarity at a suitable time.

In respect of Question 2, The Revd David Sims (Walsall) welcomed the uptick in vocations to ordained ministry that was mentioned in the answer. He asked whether there was any information on the reasons for this.

The Strategy Programme Director answered that this season we were sending forward eighteen potential candidates to BAP, and this was attributable to the immense hard work of the BDO, Romita Shrisunder and her team.

In respect of Question 3, The Revd David Sims (Walsall) asked whether there was anything Synod could do to encourage the Faculty Process to speed up.

The Diocesan Secretary answered, that while Synod in its corporate capacity could do very little, individual members could help greatly. This was by encouraging those making applications to ensure good research, understand the missional purpose, prepare a good Statement of Significance and work with architects and diocesan staff on preparing proposals so that they were likely to meet the requirements of the nationally prescribed process.

Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) asked whether the recent advert for a List B Casework Officer had been filled.

The Diocesan Secretary confirmed it had not been filled and would be readvertised.

In respect of Question 8, The Revd Paul Kingman (Stone) asked if we were likely to adopt a strategy from another diocese on this matter.

Bishop Michael said this was a helpful suggestion that he would explore further.

In respect of Question 11, Mr Phil Dooley (Wolverhampton) asked what had been the thinking behind moving the Walsall Archdeaconry Visitations to the Cathedral.

The Revd Jim Trood (Walsall) explained that last year, himself and Julia Cody were newly appointed as Acting Archdeacons and had been unable, for practical reasons, to attend multiple visitations. This had continued this year as the new Archdeacon of Walsall had come into post just before visitations, but it was not necessarily planned to continue this going forward.

In respect of Question 12, Mrs Josephine Locke (Newcastle) wished to pass on grateful thanks to Angela Bruno, the Diocesan Data Manager, for the clarity of the answer given.

The President closed the meeting in prayer.

All papers and presentations are linked from the web page [here](#).