

WORCESTER DIOCESAN SYNOD
the First Session of the Nineteenth Synod
and a general meeting of the
WORCESTER DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE LIMITED

Synod 4th November 2024

Questions received under SO71

From Nick Gowers

(1) 2025 Budget

Parish assets that funded clergy stipends were transferred to Diocesan Stipend Funds (DSF) in 1949. In Worcester this is now our Total Return. DSF is limited to the use of clergy stipends, national insurance, pension contributions and repair and maintenance of clergy houses.

- a) How is income from the DSF / TR included within Ministry Share calculations and this communicated to parishes?
- b) Shouldn't TR be included as regular income against Stipend and parsonage costs rather than as funding from reserves?

Response by Andy Todd, Diocesan Secretary

A core aim of Ministry Share is that, as far as possible, current giving should pay for ministry received. When the Ministry Share system was introduced, this was considered to be a characteristic of a 'healthy and sustainable' financial system.

This core aim is of course subject in particular to reductions in Ministry Share request where nationally-provided LiNC funding is available.

For a transitional period, further grants have also been made available to support parishes/clusters which are unable to meet their full Ministry Share. These grants have been made from the Ministry Support Fund, funded mainly out of Total Return from the Stipends Capital Fund. Grants are agreed annually between affected parishes/clusters and the DBF. Total grants in the years 2022-2024 are expected to be £1.9m (this figure includes shortfalls where parishes/clusters have not paid the net request in full).

The accounting for Total Return in our financial statements has been thoroughly discussed with our auditors and we believe follows best accounting practice (with the proviso that the Finance and Resources Committee will be reviewing a proposal to amend slightly the disclosures to make it even clearer that transfers under Total Return are only used to fund stipends and related costs). Fundamentally, the assets of the Stipends Capital Fund are shown in the financial statements as reserves, so it is correct to show their use under Total Return as transfers from reserves.

(2) Environmental Strategy DS 24 (12)

What measures are being put in place to ensure that the Diocesan Environmental Strategy...

- (a) does not put un-realistic requirements on churches with the fewest financial and

professional resources?

(b) does not (inadvertently or otherwise) divert parish resources from existing evangelism and discipleship programs/work?

Response from David Hewlett and Mark Carter

(a) The Climate Crisis Task Group (CCTG) is very conscious that the technical and financial questions for any church about how best to achieve the decarbonisation required by General Synod are very challenging. The National Church Institutions also recognises this and it is for this reason that the appointment and work of the (nationally funded) diocesan and regional officers is going to be so crucial. Over the next two years they will take a lead on identifying what works for a range of different types of churches and settings. Building this national data bank of technical solutions, and garnering the experience of pilot projects, will provide dioceses and local churches with feasible and proven models for adoption, with working examples available for inspection. This will greatly reduce the need for expensive and uncertain feasibility and consultancy work, and will provide, if not off-the shelf models, something approaching that for churches of all sizes and use profiles.

We expect that this guidance and funded support will remain in place for the rest of this decade, so that the burden on churches is minimised when implementing their net zero goals. Staff will – in addition to deploying potential capital funding from the national church – seek to cement strong relationships with external funding bodies to maximise opportunities through them, many of whom are themselves now prioritising decarbonising projects through their funding. The task group will also be exploring how the good practice of the different models can help smooth the path of permissions for the work. There remains a recognition that there will be churches where net zero is unfeasible and will consider how best to identify these and the best ways of off-setting their emissions to support the overall aim of the Synod. In the short-term there may be churches for whom the need to replace a heating system due to the life expiry of the current system comes prior to these resources being fully available, we stand ready to support them on an individual basis too.

(b) CCTG is convinced that the missional commitments of the church are *both* to evangelism/discipleship *and* to safeguarding God's creation, and certainly do not want to see one at the expense of the other. Indeed, we believe that with the majority of people - especially young people - deeply concerned about the future of our planet, evangelism and discipleship that does not embrace this (or a church that is seen to ignore this) will be less engaging and effective. We also believe that there will be people in our churches and communities who may not feel their gifts lie in other areas of evangelism but who would relish the opportunity to address environmental and climate matters. In addition to technical support outlined above, we plan to offer training and resources to parishes in how to integrate care for creation – as set out in the fifth *Mark of Mission* – into their evangelism, liturgy and daily life.

From Ben Somervell

(3) Does the Diocese have plans to offer Additional Episcopal Care-style arrangements for those who hold to a traditional view of human sexuality and marriage, as the Dioceses of Lichfield and Oxford have done with Confirmations and Ordinations?

If not, why not and how might such a lack of provision be consistent with the Diocese's welcoming of the Bishop of Oswestry as an Honorary Assistant Bishop?

Response from +Martin:

As a diocese we are committed to honouring all people in the current national debates on human sexuality and marriage, and ensuring there is no discrimination experienced by any of our clergy or parishes on this matter, whatever their personal views. Oxford and Lichfield diocese are considerably bigger than Worcester, with four full time bishops in each case. We are able to offer additional episcopal care on a more informal basis, and many clergy receive support and counsel from one of our Honorary Assistant bishops, who also take occasional confirmation services in the diocese. I am most grateful for their ministry, especially while I am the acting diocesan bishop.

In 2025 I have arranged three Cathedral confirmations to which any parish can bring candidates. In addition each Deanery will be offered a date for a Deanery confirmation. I hope these nine dates will give ample opportunity for parishes to encourage many to make their faith commitment and join together in celebration. If these dates are not sufficient, for whatever reason, individual parishes can apply to the Bishop's Office for a confirmation on another date led by one of our Honorary Assistant bishops, subject to their availability. They include the Bishop of Oswestry who I know is happy to assist when his diary allows.

All recent ordinations have been carried out by myself or Bishop John, and, God willing, I will be ordaining both deacons and priests in 2025. If national guidelines or a code of conduct are agreed by the House of Bishops or General Synod at some future point, they will be brought to this Synod and taken forward as appropriate.

(4) To whom is the Church of England's West Midlands Racial Justice Unit accountable?

Response drafted by Jan Smart, Diocesan Secretary, Birmingham (the 'lead' diocese in the regional collaboration):

The West Midlands Racial Justice Team are a newly appointed team to deliver the programme which has been funded by the CofE National Racial Justice Unit. The bid for funding is a collaboration between the six dioceses of the West Midlands (Birmingham, Coventry, Gloucester, Hereford, Lichfield and Worcester). A joint venture agreement has been set up by the six dioceses and a WM Regional Racial Justice Board has been established to lead and govern the programme. Each diocese has nominated two board members (the board members from Worcester diocese are Bishop Martin and Robert Barbour) and the Dean of Gloucester has been chosen from among the board members to be the chair. The Board had overall responsibility to the funder (National RJU) to ensure the outcomes in the bid are delivered. The Regional Racial Justice Team are accountable to the Regional RJ Board. The chair is the line manager of the Regional RJ Director who leads that team.

As the joint venture is not set up to be an employing entity, Birmingham Diocese offered to hold the employment of the members of the Regional RJ Team on behalf of the collaboration.

From Jon Evans

(5) What is the average age of licensed lay ministers (LLMs) within this diocese and how does this compare to the national average? And what numbers are we seeing being newly licensed annually along with their average age and how do the numbers compare with expected outgoing?

Unfortunately due to absences of key personnel we have been unable to provide an answer in time for Synod. A response will be circulated as soon as possible.

From Robin LaFontaine

6. Has the Diocese collected energy usage details from churches in the Diocese and if so:
(a) are these going to be published so that we can all understand the net zero challenge and individual churches can see how they compare with other churches?
(b) please explain why it will take another two years to work out the top 20% of church building emitters and complete an action plan for decarbonisation, given that we have (by end 2024) three full-time regional officers to provide expert input?

Response from Mark Carter and Lee Westcott

Through the completion of the Energy Footprint Tool, and the commissioning of Energy Audits (funded variously by the national church and the DBF) at higher-emitting churches, we have energy data on around 60% of churches in this diocese. There is a requirement for dioceses to publish an annual emissions report to Diocesan Synod using, as a basis, the data collected nationally through the Energy Footprint Tool. Due to delays in analysing the data in the Research and Statistics department nationally, we aren't able to present the data for 2023 just yet but would hope to do so at the next Synod. As we increase this data towards first target of 90%, we will be able to properly identify the top 20% of emitters. National data shows that the top 20% of churches account for over 70% of emissions hence the necessity to act strategically with these. Direct comparison between churches is probably an unfair one as emissions can vary based upon the age, size and complexity of the building, the use profile of the church, and the current heating system.

The timescales quoted are based around those set by the Routemap to Net Zero published by the Church of England Environment Programme, with each of the identified top 20% requiring an action plan to be in place by 2027. We would hope to complete these earlier, coinciding with the end of the current funding for the officers in mid-2026 (hence the two years). Between them, the three officers (of which, only those based in Worcester and Gloucester have currently been appointed) cover over 1000 churches across the three dioceses, plus the housing stock, church schools and other in-scope properties and activities of the dioceses; supporting action plans for some 200 churches will be completed in line with many other requirements.

7. For many years, Susan Logan was the heating expert on the DAC and in that role provided Great Malvern Priory (and I am sure other churches) with invaluable advice which we very much appreciated. Will at least one of the new regional officers have a similar level of technical experience and qualifications to help individual churches to upgrade their heating systems and meet net zero?

Response from Mark Carter and Lee Westcott

The services of Susan Logan as a volunteer DAC adviser on heating and renewables for many years was an important resource for parishes, unfortunately we've not been able to replace like-for-like in a volunteer capacity since she stepped down for personal reasons in 2022. This is despite several

advertisements including with industry bodies such as CIBSE. As those involved in parish roles will recognise, the downside of receiving excellent support from volunteers is that the financial cost of providing equivalent support can easily become hidden, so that, when that support ceases, its loss is more greatly felt. Though we retain some technical advice to the DAC through new appointments, they don't have the availability to offer advice visits to parishes with that technical specialism. The role of the regional project officers is not to be technical specialists but to provide all-round provision in pursuance of the requirements set of the dioceses by General Synod. We absolutely recognise the need for getting the right technical support to parishes as a key determiner in feeling that they are obtaining the correct solutions. The issue is being explored nationally, with a view to setting up consultancy support for DACs and Dioceses when exploring significant heating schemes for churches. This will inevitably be useful, but presumably a service in high demand and we do not know what service agreement will be in place to determine how and what that support will look like. We are also exploring the costs and practicalities of seeking some dedicated regional advice and support in the tri-diocese cluster that might be more accessible to individual churches. We are building a good picture of how to heat different types of churches, so the specialist support would be focused on the technical questions around correct specification and engineering support for design and installation. This would provide a more tailored service, but obviously comes at a cost which will need to be funded.

From Rich Hackett

8. Many of us, have been struggling with the National Churches NetZero commitment, not for want of trying, but because situations in parishes are already increasingly challenging. Simply, in many of my churches we have run out of resources, and the skillsets required for grasping these projects are simply no longer available.

The result of which is that this becomes another task sitting on the priests desk, amongst all the other things.

Is it possible for the CCTG to provide resources to visit parishes and form a plan with them?

Response by Mark Carter

The new regional officers are a first step in seeking to identify what resources – whether financial, or personnel, or other – will be required to support parishes and the wider diocese (including clergy housing and schools) towards becoming Net Zero by 2030. The CCTG is a coordinating group, and save for our regional officer, not bringing any new resource (the other staff who engage with CCTG are all already fully engaged with pre-existing workload). As per the answer to the question from Robin LaFontaine, we will seek to work closely with those 20% of churches with the highest emissions as set out in the requirements of the General Synod but without further staff resource it just won't be possible to engage with every parish in the same way.

9. Secondly, my 3 parishes are all in low income areas, in which character, neurodiversity and education levels are vastly different to more affluent parishes.

NetZero changes and associated grant funding often require a significant amount of paperwork spanning Faculty, Local Council, and awarding bodies, which is beyond the capability within the parish.

What support can the diocese commit to, to supporting parishes in low income areas, to not just advise, but manage them through the faculty and Local Council processes.

Could this be a use for LInC funding?

Response by Andy Todd

LInC funding provided by the National Church is used to support churches in our most deprived communities in two ways:

(1) through the Ministry Share grants mechanism, to reduce the net Ministry Share request for eligible churches. As Ministry Share goes toward paying for ministry received in parishes, it would not be appropriate to use this LInC funding to support Net Zero work directly; and

(2) as part of the Healthier Churches Fund grants system, focused on churches in low income areas.

As noted on the Diocesan website (here: [Healthier Churches Fund - Diocese of Worcester](#)) the Healthier Churches Fund exists to help parishes with funding for “projects to help make a difference in reaching out to their community and bring more people to faith”. The funding specifically cannot be used for building works. Whether there might be projects with a significant environmental/net zero element which could potentially fit with the Healthier Churches Fund’s objectives would need, like all HCF applications, to be considered on a case by case basis. Fundamentally, however, as previous answers have noted, the resources to make a significant impact on addressing Net Zero priorities are well beyond the Diocese’s current ability to fund: hence the vital importance of the current scoping work being done by the regional officers (and others nationally) to build a detailed picture of the size of the task and the scale of resources required, in order to feed into national funding discussions.