

Question under Standing Order 71 – Diocesan Synod, July 2026

From Hugh Richards:

In the Church Times of 19 June 2026, The Right Reverend Colin Fletcher, lately Bishop of Dorchester and now Chair of the Retired Clergy Association (Church of England), noted the growing dependence on “the ministry of retired priests to maintain the regular pattern of Sunday and weekday services in our parishes” and welcomed dioceses that “look for best practice and constantly seek ways to affirm retired clergy and their spouses”.

What measures does this Diocese have in place to enable, value and support retired clergy in their continuing ministries?

Response from Bishop Hugh:

Clergy who retire into this diocese from elsewhere and apply for PtO here will normally first meet up with their ‘designated responsible person’, usually the incumbent of the parish in which the retired cleric intends to offer most of their ministry. The application form includes a statement of expectations which are agreed between the retiree and the incumbent. The purpose of the statement is to ensure that the retiree is comfortable with the offer, and to guard against them feeling obliged or pressured to do more than they are willing to do. The form is currently under revision so we can build a fuller profile of the applicant and see if they might be interested in offering ministry in contexts other than their home parish. The intention is to give them scope to continue to pursue a particular interest they may have, such as social responsibility, ecumenism, care of creation. The designated responsible person provides pastoral care and support. The statement of expectations is to be reviewed annually and amended as necessary.

Once we have received the application, the applicant will need to have DBS clearance with us; safeguarding training is portable: we ask to see their certificate. If the training has lapsed, they are booked on to a course here. The Bishop’s Chaplain requests a reference from the ‘sending’ bishop. The Bishop’s Chaplain meets the applicant to welcome them and to discuss their intentions. The Chaplain always emphasises that it is permission to officiate, not obligation, and that if they feel they are being asked to do more – or indeed if they feel they would like to do more – they should contact the Chaplain. This establishes a direct link for the applicant to the Bishop’s Office.

We have two Co-Deans of retired clergy, their spouses and surviving partners of deceased clergy. The Co-Deans meet regularly with the Bishop’s Chaplain to discuss individual cases in confidence and to consider issues that affect all or some groups of retired clergy, such as changes in housing provision. They offer individual pastoral care in times of need, liaising with the relevant incumbent and the Bishop’s Chaplain when necessary. The Co-Deans organise an annual quiet day, a Christmas lunch, and occasional ‘pop up’ pub lunches. With the Bishop’s Chaplain they organise an annual service of Holy Communion in the Cathedral, followed by a reception in the Old Palace hosted by the Bishop.