

Agenda Ref	9.1
Report Title	Board of Directors, Bishop's Council and Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Committee Report (8 July, 18 August, 14 October & 31 October 2025)
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The Bishop's Council, Board of Directors, and Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Committee met on the following dates in 2025: 8 July, 18 August, 14 October, and 31 October.

Education

Children, Young Person and Families (CYPF) Strategy

Canon Liz Townend (Director of Education) presented the CYPF strategy to Bishop's Council on 14 October 2025.

The strategy comprises nine priorities, and is designed with the aim of giving children the best possible start in life, allowing them to develop spiritually at home, in church and in school. It is envisaged that the nine aims of the strategy will be achieved by 2040. The top three priorities are:

- The church school partnership
- CYPF chaplaincies
- Developing Christian youth leaders

Work continues to understand how CYPF can be more involved in the governance of the Diocese.

The Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust (DBAT)

DBAT applied to Companies House for strike off on 17th July 2025. This was accepted on 24th July 2025, beginning the two-month period during which a closure notice is published in the relevant Gazette prior to final strike off.

Ordained and Lay Ministers

Bishop's Council discussed the latest information on clergy wellbeing, where a number are reporting depression, and some are feeling overwhelmed. Concurrently, a number of Licensed Lay Ministers (LLMs) are seeking to be

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employed more gainfully in support of their clergy colleagues. Work is underway to see if these two situations can help to resolve each other.

Living in Love and Faith (LLF)/Prayers in Love and Faith (PLF)

Bishop's Council discussed recent developments with PLF and the need to properly plan for the Diocesan Synod on the subject. Bishop Neil met with representatives from various interested parties to agree the agenda and to ensure a balanced and harmonious meeting ensued. The outcomes of the meeting – from all perspectives - have been collated and sent to National Church to inform the House of Bishops' deliberations.

FINANCES

Annual Report & Financial Statements for Year Ending 31st December 2024

A hybrid Bishop's Council meeting was arranged for 18 August for the purpose of considering *The Bristol Diocesan Board of Finance Limited Annual Report & Financial Statements* (which included Directors Report and Trustees Report) for the year ending 31 December 2024.

Bishop's Council voted to approve the report, which was signed by Richard Bacon, in his capacity as Chair of the Bristol Diocesan Board of Finance (BDBF), before it was delivered to Companies House ahead of the deadline of 30 September 2025.

In this meeting, Bishop's Council also approved a '*Letter of Representation*' to be sent to HaysMac LLP (BDBF's auditors).

Diocesan Finance Review

Richard Bacon briefed Bishop's Council on the outcomes of the recent Diocesan Finance Review - which has left the Diocese worse off than before - and the significant additional pressure on the budget from the perfect storm of (3.8%) inflation, significant Employer's NIC increases, and next year's 9% Stipend increase. These changes, seen alongside zero real terms growth in parish share, collectively put our finances in a very challenging position going forward – potentially exhausting our reserves. A task group, with independent financial advice, has been established to determine what needs to be done. This synod will be briefed on the extent of the challenge and the potential solutions the task group has discerned.

Much of the 'heavy lifting' to rebalance our income and expenditure will have to start in the 2026 budget, which will be briefed at this synod. The challenge will be to balance the need to make savings on the one hand, whilst maintaining legal compliance and missional activity on the other.

2026 Budget

Bishop's Council considered the 2026 budget in the light of an extremely challenging forward landscape; the negative Diocesan Finance Review, 9%

Stipend Increases, 3.8 % Inflation and Employer's National Insurance Contribution increases – when set alongside zero real terms growth in Parish Share – mean that our long-term financial position is now unsustainable. The 2026 budget is a reflection of the seriousness of the situation and takes a number of significant actions to start to overcome the operating deficit. The 2026 Budget was approved by Bishop's Council and is recommended to Synod at this meeting. More information on the long-term financial challenge will be presented at this Synod.

Governance

Bishop's Council and The Board of Directors undertook their routine business of overseeing the Finance, Audit + Risk, and Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Committees' Activities and decisions.

Deanery Synod Formulas 2026 – 2029

Options for the formula for the next Deanery Synod triennium were considered leading to a recommendation outlined in a separate paper. Diocesan Synod will be asked to approve the Deanery Synod election formula as part of the motion to receive this report.

Vacancy In See

Bishop's Council was advised that the Vacancy-in-See Committee had, in its last meeting on 18 September 2025, approved the Statement of Needs which can be found [here](#).

In addition, Bishop's Council was advised that the following ViSC Committee members had been elected by the Committee to sit on the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC) alongside six representatives from the National Church.

- Dr Brendan Biggs
- The Revd Kat Campion-Spall
- The Revd Will Fairbairn
- The Very Revd Dr Mandy Ford
- Mrs Caroline Jowett-Ive
- Mrs Alison Rowe

The next steps are:

- The Archbishops Appointments team will draft their view of the needs of the
- Diocese, which will be considered alongside the Statement of Needs we have
- written.
- The CNC representatives will meet to be briefed on the process
- The CNC will meet to discern suitable candidates, who will then be interviewed
- Once No 10 and the Palace have approved the nomination – possibly mid 2026 - the name will be announced

- The new Bishop will take up their appointment in the Autumn/Winter of 2026.

Bishop's Council offered support to +Neil throughout the vacancy in any way they could, and offered their sincere heartfelt thanks and best wishes to Bishop Viv for her dedication and leadership of the Diocese over the last 7 years.

Parish Share

Bishop's Council discussed Parish Share on two occasions. There is considerable concern that the level of giving has not returned to pre-covid levels (dropping by 25% in real terms) and the gap between Parish Share and Cost of Ministry is widening; now to over £1.5m, which is unsustainable, especially given the other pressures on our budget.

It was noted that some parishes simply cannot pay more, but there are also some parishes who could, but don't, for a variety of reasons.

Bishop's Council noted the cultural reticence to discuss money in parishes, but that the theology of generosity is clear and there are materials available to support Ministers and PCCs to encourage people to be more generous. It was noted that if all our parishioners gave £3 a week more, it would reduce the Ministry funding gap by £1m per annum.

It was agreed that work should be undertaken with the parishes who could pay more, plus the broader issue of the culture of discipleship and generosity with the Diocese. This Diocesan Synod will begin to address this challenge.

The Kindness Alliance

Bishop's Council was advised that the constitution and branding for The Kindness Alliance was formally agreed at the Kindness Alliance trustee meeting on 4th August and an application for charitable registration was submitted to the Charity Commission (CC) in mid-August. The CC has confirmed that applications are currently taking a minimum of 16 weeks to reach the assessment stage, which itself takes approximately 8 weeks.

To progress the work of The Kindness Alliance, the next steps will be:

- The Trustees clarifying and articulating the purpose of The Kindness Alliance in light of churches' independent fundraising capabilities and understanding of reserves position.
- Developing a reserves policy that supports fundraising applications and aligns with best practice for Trusts and Foundations.
- Scoping the infrastructure and staffing requirements, including cost estimates.
- Identifying potential funding sources to support the operational costs of The Kindness Alliance, ensuring this does not impact on the direct income of the Diocese and PCCs.

Racial Justice Annual Update

Susanne Semedo (Racial Justice Project Lead) provided an annual update to Bishop's Council. Susanne advised that the Racial Justice Team had become fully operational after the embedding of resources which had enabled work to commence concerning issues of contested heritage and awareness raising activities.

Bishop's Council was advised the team aims to build a more strategic, outcome-focused approach to their work. Culture will be central to this, and will help to promote a sustainable change.

Bishop's Council also reviewed the recent Diocesan Synod discussion on All Saints Corn Street, and were briefed on the ongoing (and impending) consultations on the building's future use.

Safeguarding

Bishop's Council have received a variety of updates – written and verbal – on Safeguarding, and were reassured of good progress with the audit recommendations and a number of Nationally-led changes.

The number of reported cases has risen recently (as it has with many other Dioceses) and GERALYN MEEHAN (GM) is increasing resources as necessary to ensure our DSO is not overwhelmed.

Confirmation has been received that the Innovation and Impact funding panel had approved the South West's Dioceses application for funding (albeit at a lesser amount than requested). Bristol will be leading.

Bishop's Council was briefed on the new 'Code of Practice for Managing Safeguarding Concerns and Allegations'. This has significant potential impact on Parish Safeguarding Officers and volunteering teams. GM advised that plans will be put in place using national materials to ensure we all are aware of the changes, and supported in implementing them. Parishes will not be expected to update their policies to align with the new framework until their policies are due to be updated in normal course (annually).

Work continues on exploring the feasibility of 'Option 4' for the independent future of Safeguarding (as mandated by General Synod). The emphasis has shifted recently towards an implicit assumption that Option 4 is where we are heading, and it's simply a case of working out how.

Transforming Church. Together Strategy (TC.T)

Bishop's Council have continued to monitor progress with TC.T and were briefed on progress to date, notably:

- There are ongoing concerns regarding parishes' ability to generate income, however work continues in this area with the appointment of Volunteers Adviser and Volunteering Coordinator.
- Positive learnings have emerged from the Focused Support Initiatives (FSIs) which we hope can be applied wider across the Diocese.
- A bid is to be submitted by the end of 2025 to extend funding for the Children & Young People (CYP) and Priority Community Network (PCN) projects so they can run through to 2030.

Bishop's Council was briefed on the current funding dialogue with the Diocesan Support Unit (who support the Strategic Mission and Ministry Board [SMMIB]). It is anticipated that they will approve the recent request to 'vire' funds between projects - where we have either underspent, or need longer funding - and will look positively on the upcoming bid for CYPF and PCN funding.

Bishop's Council noted the disconnect between the House of Bishop's view that 'CYPF is the priority of priorities' and yet SMMIB investment decisions are not yet reflecting this.

Casual Vacancy in Clerical Representation on General Synod

The Revd Canon Paul Langham retired on 31 August 2025. Most recently, Paul had represented the Diocese as one of our clergy members in the House of Clergy (Lower House of Convocation) for General Synod.

Following his retirement, Paul is no longer be eligible to serve on General Synod, which created a casual vacancy in our clerical representation.

Although there is no requirement to fill a casual vacancy occurring within twelve months of an ordinary election, the clerical members of the Bishop's Council and Standing Committee can direct that an election be held.

In this case, Bishop's Council directed that an election should take place.

At the time of writing this paper, the vote is open. The two candidates are The Revd Rich Cresswell and The Revd Adam Beaumont. Voting will close on 5 November, with the results expected to be published on 6 November 2025.

Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee (DMPC)

In addition to noting several matters that are currently in progress, the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee (DMPC) made recommendations to the Bishop about 2 suspensions, 0 pastoral schemes/orders, and 0 BMO.

The Concord Church BMO commenced 1st August 2025. In line with the rule 24 (1) of the Church Representation Rules (CRR) 2022, the Committee considered a Scheme to provide for representation for the Bishop's Mission Order (BMO) Concord Church, Bristol on Deanery Synod. The Committee duly recommended

the CRR Scheme. Diocesan Synod will be asked to approve the CRR Scheme as part of the motion to receive this report.