



Bishop's Council and Board of Directors report

6 December 2018 and 13 February 2019

The Bishop's Council has met twice since the last Diocesan Synod. The meeting in December 2018 was the last of the previous triennium and the meeting in February 2019 was the first of the new triennium. As a result, in December, Mat Ineson, Peter Robottom were thanked for their service, each over a number of years; and, in February, Trudie Wigley, Kate Davison, Chris Dursley and John Sunderland were welcomed to their first meeting.

At this point of transition, at both meetings, the primary focus of the Bishop's Council and Board of Directors was reflection on the life of the Diocese – its recent history and next steps – focused through preparation for and feedback from the Diocesan Peer Review.

Diocesan Peer Review

Peer Review is a national exercise with the aim of facilitating mutual learning, improving shared accountability and being of real value to the diocese being reviewed. The process has been in place for almost three years and this was the second of Bristol's biennial reviews. The review takes the form of a self-assessment that reports progress since the last review in November 2016, and assesses strengths and weaknesses across six areas of diocesan life. This is supported by a range of documentation provided by the Diocese. The self-assessment was drawn up by the Bishop's Staff following consultation with Area Deans, Deanery Lay Chairs, diocesan officers and the Bishop's Council.

The Peer Review panel is drawn from across the Church of England. As well as examining the documentation, the panel speak with a range of people from across the Diocese and then meet for a day with members of the senior team in the Diocese. In Bristol's case, the panel met with Bishop Viv, Bishop Lee, Oliver Home, Michael Johnson, Liz Townend, Andrew Lucas and Bruce Finnamore on 7 February 2019. In the second round of reviews, dioceses were asked to nominate three areas from the self-assessment for focussed discussion. In addition, the panel asks about how the Diocese is approaching and using the Lowest Income Communities Funding which is granted by the Archbishop's Council and is used to support ministry in the Diocese's most deprived communities.

As a result of the Bishop's Council in December, the Diocese chose to discuss the following areas in more depth: Re-imagining Ministry; Resources, finance & buildings; and Transforming Communities and Serving Individuals. The Peer Review report was returned prior to the Bishop's Council meeting so that it might be discussed. The Diocese now makes a formal response and further work is required on this before sharing the outcomes fully.

The panel praised the open and constructive nature of the discussions. It recognised that the diocesan team was both realistic – in the face of numerical decline and financial challenges, for example – and hopeful – in the God we serve and in the opportunities for growth, re-imagined ministry and serving the common good throughout the diocese. It also affirmed strongly a whole range of areas of the Diocese's life and mission

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The report contained many recommendations for the senior team and wider diocese. These included:

- being courageous and relentless in pursuit of the vision of Creating connections – with God, each other, our communities, including remaining missionally focused, with an explicit focus on both numerical and spiritual growth.
- being imaginative and consistent about how the vision, priorities and what that means in practice are communicated through engagements by senior leaders, stories and other means. This included being more explicit in affirming existing established areas of the life of the Diocese, for example, fresh expressions, discipleship on the “frontline” and generosity and giving.
- continuing to address the need to increase Parish Share and describing the investments in ministry and mission that the Diocese is making to encourage that.
- being clear about the role and opportunities for senior leaders to be a voice and witness in the public square and reflecting on what only the senior diocesan team and central diocesan staff can do in relation to serving individuals and transforming communities.

The Bishop's Council discussed areas of priority from the report to feed into the response.

At the December meeting, the Bishop's Council reviewed and captured learning about the working of the Bishop's Council in the previous triennium.

At the February meeting, Bishop Viv outlined some of the tasks for the new triennium, including using processes like the Peer Review, Vacancy in See and Crown Nominations Commission to help, over the next 18 months, form a basis of review for the current strategic plan and set priorities and plans for the next strategic plan. At the Bishop's Council residential, which will be facilitated by an external consultant, work will begin on overseeing this process.

Bishop's Council members were also assigned a portfolio so that they might have a special interest in and understanding of an area of work to ensure due regard is given at the Council

Finance and risk

At the December 2018 meeting, the Audit Committee reported on the significant risks to the Diocesan Board of Finance and the mitigations that were in place. The Board of Directors was content that risks were being monitored and managed appropriately and these will be reported to the Synod in the 2018 Annual Report and Financial Statements in June. The Directors reviewed and agreed that the DBF would maintain a “Cautious” risk appetite for all impact areas.

Following the approval of the 2019 Budget by the Diocesan Synod, Matthew Hall drafted a paper on behalf of the Finance Committee that highlighted the particular financial risks and challenges facing the DBF. These primarily relate to increasing Parish Share to invest in the training of ordinands and curates; and to selling properties that are surplus to operational requirements (i.e. to house clergy) according to timetable to be able to purchase houses for the increased number of curates and to maintain and grow investment income to subsidise ministry. The Directors discussed and endorsed the measures in place to achieve these and the ongoing support for the financial plans that support the Diocese's vision and priorities while ensuring that this was kept under constant review.

Diocesan Synod

As Standing Committee to the Diocesan Synod, in December, the Bishop's Council reviewed the November Synod, highlighting the issues and affirming the levels of engagement, and set the major items for March Synod. In February, it discussed, amended and approved the March agenda in detail.

Oliver Home, Diocesan Secretary
15 February