

Diocesan Synod annual report (for inclusion in PCC Annual reports)

The Diocesan Synod, which is the primary, elected representative body drawn from across the Diocese of Bristol, met four times in 2021: in March, June and then following the elections for a new Synod in September and November. As well as hearing about and discussing a wide range of areas of the Church's work, it helps formulate and approve policy and the diocesan budget and debates important local and national issues affecting the Church.

Transforming Church Together

A large part of the Synod's work during 2021 was focussed on Transforming Church Together. In March the Synod took part in the consultation and engagement process that took place right across the Diocese. At its June meeting the early findings of that consultation process were shared with the Synod and members had the opportunity to reflect on these, feeding back their ideas which led into the development of the Vision, Purpose and Values. In November the Archdeacons led an activity introducing the Synod to the emerging strategic priorities.

Diocesan finances

The Synod's role approving the financial plans of the Diocesan Board of Finance was part of both the June and November meetings. In June Andrew Lucas, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, presented the 2020 Annual Report and Financial Statements and updated the Synod about the performance of the organisation in strategic as well as financial terms.

In November, he presented the 2022 Budget for approval and Synod members participated in round table discussions to follow up any clarifying points and share views on the proposed budget.

Andrew reflected on the impact of the pandemic on the DBF's finances, long-term issues of affordability for the Diocese, the future impact of the new strategy and the strength of the DBF's balance sheet.

He also highlighted the tension between the desire to balance the budget and the need to invest in future ministry, with a large part of the projected deficit of £681k in 2022 being due to our continuing commitment to investing in future ministry. With prayerful consideration, the Synod approved budgeted expenditure of £9.712m in 2022.

Other reports and discussions included:

The **Annual Safeguarding Report** in June, presented by Andy Wills, Independent Chair who spoke to synod about the considerable developments by the National Safeguarding Team following the publication of the report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), and media attention on a number of issues.

As the **Creating Connections** strategy came to the end of its active period during the year and the Synod heard reports from some of the initiatives and projects which had been started to support it.

Bishop Lee recapped that **investing in curacies** was one of the main strategic choices under Creating Connections, which committed the Diocese to growing vocations to ordained ministry by 50%. This was in line with a national Church of England initiative in the light of the gap between ordinations and retirements. A 50% increase would largely meet overall stipendiary clergy deployment plans nationwide.

The Synod heard from Liz Townend (Diocesan Director of Education), who gave a presentation on education work in the Diocese and specifically the growth of **new church schools**.

Two years after Diocesan Synod declared a **climate emergency** in November 2019, Clare Fussell (Diocesan Environmental Officer) gave an update report to Diocesan Synod members on progress.