

BRIEFING PAPER FOR CLERGY



This paper sets the context for the discussions we are having in the deanery as well as to provide the details of the proposed scheme being considered. We hope this will inform you as you communicate more widely with your parishes.

Deployment work in Winchester Diocese

The primary way in which, as a diocese, we invest in the mission and ministry of the Church is through the provision of stipendiary clergy to provide pastoral care and leadership in their particular contexts. In 2019 The Bishop of Winchester convened a Deployment Working Group to consider the number and location of our stipendiary clergy appointments, and to make recommendation as to how finite resources could be allocated in a way which best addressed the missional priorities which our Diocesan Synod had formulated and adopted at its 2013 and 2016 conferences. The work involved a comprehensive review of every deanery, benefice and parish in the diocese, using electoral rolls, statistics for mission, financial information, schools information, and Experian data on population and other social demographics. The group presented its finding to Diocesan Synod in July 2019 and Synod asked the group to continue working with our approximately 140 stipendiary posts, to formulate proposals for pastoral changes which would deliver a more coherent approach to deployment.

Covid and the Financial Situation in the Diocese

In 2020, as this working group was beginning to formulate proposals for pastoral change, the coronavirus pandemic placed immediate and unforeseen pressure on the finances of the Diocesan Board of Finance (WDBF). The Bishop, with the support of the WDBF, responded to a significant £2million deficit in our budget (an element of which was an underlying deficit) by commissioning a Resilience Task Group to identify and recommend necessary savings. You will, I am sure, be aware that most dioceses in the Church of England are facing similar kinds of challenges where funding sources have been adversely affected by the current crisis. Some dioceses have significant historic reserves which may provide a temporary cushion at such times; in Winchester 80% of income comes from parish giving and 80% of expenditure goes on providing parish clergy; we have no such reserves. The bitterly hard recommendation the WDBF is following involves a £0.75m cut in diocesan office/central posts (implemented by the end of 2020) and £1.25m saving in clergy stipends and housing, which equates to 22 posts.

Pastoral Reorganisation

The saving of clergy posts necessitates significant pastoral reorganisation, so that every parish continues to be under the care of an incumbent and, wherever possible, is sustainable for the future. 58 benefices (involving 141 parishes) are expected to be involved in pastoral reorganisation over the coming months.

Building on the deployment work already undertaken, the suffragan bishops and archdeacons held further conversations with the leadership of each of our deaneries last autumn and have since brought draft proposals to the joint Archdeaconry and then Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committees. Over the last couple of months the suffragan bishops have spoken with each of the incumbents affected by these draft proposals and, scheme by scheme, we are now briefing all benefices affected and entering into informal consultations.