

## **Deployment Review – 2020**

A number of factors have come together making urgent a review of the pattern of deployment of stipendiary clergy across the Diocese. This paper reflects on those factors and draws out the principles that are proposed to guide our response as we endeavour to serve God and his people in this place. These seven principles are all interlinked.

This is a time for honest conversation, prayerful reflection and hopeful action.

***Principle 1: DEPRIVATION - We will give priority to ensuring that financial support is in place to continue to provide appropriate stipendiary clergy support for mission and ministry in our lowest income benefices.***

This first principle is in line with the vision for the Diocese, emerging under Bishop Graham's leadership, to ensure "an active priestly and lay worker/enabler presence in our lowest economic communities." This also reflects the focus of Jesus' ministry as reported in the Gospels (cf. Luke 4.18) and will require a rebalancing of ministerial resources across the diocese.

The focus on areas of deprivation also reflects significant changes to the annual grant we receive from the Church Commissioners. In 2018 we received £1.5 million, this will go down to £1.3 million in 2021 and to £1.2 million in 2024.

Alongside this reduction is a growing requirement to direct this money to our lowest income communities (according to the Office of National Statistics index of multi-deprivation), and by 2026 the whole grant must be directed towards the support of mission and ministry in these lowest income communities.

***Principle 2: POPULATION - We will take account of the population of benefices in determining the level of stipendiary clergy support for mission and ministry, seeking to focus resources in areas of greatest opportunity.***

Ministry needs to be focused particularly where the harvest is plentiful (Luke 10.2). We believe that the opportunity and potential for growth is also an important factor in the deployment of stipendiary clergy. There are a variety of possible ways of measuring such opportunity, but the simplest and most secure is the population of a benefice. This may result in a few benefices with high population and high levels of deprivation having an increase in stipendiary clergy provision. We currently have one benefice with a population of over 20,000 being served by one stipendiary priest, whilst there are a number of other benefices of less than 2,000 people also served by one stipendiary priest.

***Principle 3: STIPENDIARY CLERGY - We will begin a process of consultation with deaneries to reduce our stipendiary clergy numbers to 90% of the current level of posts.***

The changes to the way in which the grant from the Church Commissioners can be used will leave less room in the Diocesan budget for supporting benefices not in areas of high deprivation and

population that are struggling to pay for the full cost of ministry under TRiO. These will be largely, but not exclusively, in more rural areas, hence the need for rebalancing. Alongside this, we were beginning to see the immense achievement of raising Parish Share payments in recent years begin to plateau as increasing costs put pressure on benefice and Diocesan financial sustainability.

These pressures have been made much worse by the effects of the pandemic and lockdown, such that the most optimistic projection of the shortfall in income for 2020 is in the region of £1.5 million – the most pessimistic being closer to £3 million.

We need to take steps to ease this financial pressure and address the predicted shortfall in this and subsequent years. If we wish to avoid facing similar challenges in a few years' time, we will also need, in the words of the emerging vision, to "live a life of generous stewardship in response to God's call".

These changes can be achieved largely through retirements given that a significant number of stipendiary clergy are now in their 60s. Expected levels of retirement are still higher than those entering ministry through ordination, and so the expected reduction in overall clergy numbers should not adversely affect our commitment to bringing in new curates and seeing their ministries develop.

***Principle 4: CENTRAL COSTS - A review of central support costs (services and projects) will follow on from the Deployment Review with a view to making substantial savings, working towards achieving a balanced budget.***

In a period when there is pressure on the financial sustainability of benefices and the Diocese, we need also to review our central support costs.

With stipendiary clergy moving to 90% of the current level, we will see fewer benefices. Without taking action on central costs, this would mean the proportion of central costs payable by the benefices increasing. Such increases would not be sustainable.

With changes to our patterns of deployment, we will need to rethink priorities in mission and ministry and what central resources are essential to support these priorities. Our central services need to be aligned to the emerging priorities of our Diocesan vision.

***Principle 5: MINISTRY - We will need further innovation in identifying, developing and resourcing a wider range of ministry possibilities. Stipendiary clergy will need local support in continuing to adapt to the role of enabler and overseer of others, calling out vocations within their communities, offering training and support as well as being leaders in mission.***

The nature and shape of ministry has been changing over recent decades, and the rationale for and consequences of this review will accelerate the need for fresh-thinking and experiment in ministry and mission. Established models and expectations will be challenged.

With fewer stipendiary clergy, we will need a renewed drive for more people called to offer for Self-Supporting Ministry, and as Readers (licensed lay ministers).

We will need to build on the success of the Authorised Worship Assistants initiative, perhaps with further forms of authorised lay ministry.

In some places there may be a need to develop various forms of focal ministry, whilst elsewhere a better model will be of local shared ministry teams that are deployable across a benefice. As the emerging vision for the Diocese states: “we will promote the variety of lay and ordained ministries so that God’s call is heard and responded to in loving service” (cf. Ephesians 4.11,12).

The programme for church revitalization and planting will help develop new forms of mission and ministry.

***Principle 6: BUILDINGS - A process will be agreed to enable some churches to be designated as Festival Churches, no longer required for regular public worship, but remaining the responsibility of the PCC. A proposal will be formulated and costed for a significant expansion of the Diocesan Churches Trust, with a view to Synodical approval for this to be fully funded. Longer term strategies will also be needed.***

As the Diocese with the highest number of medieval church buildings in the country and the second largest number of church buildings of any diocese, we need to take action to address the increasing burden these buildings place upon many of our benefices.

With fewer stipendiary clergy and pressure on resources, we need to agree a significant reduction in the number of church buildings that remain in regular use for worship.

Some buildings will need to be designated as Festival Churches, not required for regular worship, but remaining a local responsibility and asset.

Other buildings will need the support of the Diocesan Churches Trust. This currently costs in the region of £1500 pa per church building, for minimal insurance and care.

In the longer term, we may need an alternative scheme or a more radical approach to closure. “We will have honest conversations about the mission potential, viability and alternative uses of our church buildings” as indicated in the emerging vision for the Diocese.

***Principle 7: LOCAL CONSULTATION - The process for enacting and implementing these principles will largely be through deanery consultations within each Archdeaconry.***

Local conversations at Deanery and Archdeaconry level will be needed to work out how best to apply these principles on the ground. This will help to take into account mission opportunities and signs of growth in the light of possible staffing figures and available financial resources. There may be changes to deaneries as we recognise the need for collaboration across current boundaries. Benefices not in receipt of low-income support will need to be financially sustainable. Many have learned lessons from the last few months of lockdown that may well shape the ‘new normal’ that will emerge as we respond to these challenges and opportunities.