

DIOCESAN SYNOD

Title: **AN APPROACH TO REDUCING STIPENDIARY NUMBERS**
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I. CONTEXT

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were following two pathways towards sustainability:

- a) First, we have been progressively reducing the number of stipendiary incumbency posts. This work began in 2011 in response to the high average age of clergy and the inevitable rate of retirements. This produced our 'minimum sustainable number' of 215 stipendiary posts in 2025 to which all deaneries are working and some have already achieved. With the withdrawal of Darlow funding, which is being phased out and will disappear entirely in 2025, our 2019 estimate of the number of stipendiary incumbents we could afford in 2025 reduced to 202. This assumed that giving levels remained constant.
- b) Second, we have recognised that a very high number of parishes do not cover their "full cost of ministry" and are being subsidised (even if they have faithfully paid their allocated parish share in full). These issues were first discussed by Diocesan Synod in November 2019 and a formal proposal to implement a new approach to how vacancies will be handled would have come to the March 2020 meeting for approval. See the paper *From Subsidy to Sustainability DS(20)02*.

These approaches remain valid but are now not sufficient to address the financial crisis we face. As a result, DS(20)02 is not being brought for approval at this meeting of Synod but its principles will help to inform the proposals in this paper.

At their meeting on 12 May 2020, the Finance Committee has approved the proposal to bring forward implementation of the planned 2025 numbers to the end of 2021. This means reducing the number of stipendiary incumbent posts from 275 (as at 31 March 2020) to 215 in the next 18 months. This paper sets out a proposed method to achieve this.

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In doing this work, it will be important that we do not unnecessarily damage our capacity for mission and ministry. As far as possible we plan to:

- a) Prune in order to enable growth. Based on Jesus' teaching in John 15, our aim must be to enable gospel growth. Care will be taken not to cut posts that have strategic potential.

- b) Include our Strategic Development Funded Church Planting Projects in this planning alongside existing incumbencies.
- c) Recognise and build on existing deanery plans.
- d) Make phased decisions so that further cuts can be implemented without major re-planning work if our financial position deteriorates and, conversely, our plans for reducing numbers can be scaled back if we can afford to do so.
- e) To proceed in hope and confidence that God's Spirit will lead us into new and fruitful ways of being church.
- f) Expect that reducing our reliance on stipendiary ordained ministry will foster new vocations to lay and ordained ministry including self-supporting, part-time and House for Duty ministry.

3. HANDLING CURRENT VACANCIES

We have an unprecedented number of vacancies across the diocese which totalled 48.5 posts at the end of March.

Freezing these vacancies would take us to within 12 posts of our 2025 objective. However, this is not recommended – not least because it would not address Principle a) above. Also, these vacancies are not uniformly distributed across all deaneries and a blanket approach would be neither missional nor fair.

However, to avoid the risk of compromising this planning task, it would be sensible to pause filling as many stipendiary vacancies as possible until September.

4. PLANNING THE REDUCTION OF STIPENDIARY POSTS

Archdeacons are asked to coordinate this work in partnership with Area Deans, Lay Chairs and Area Teams to code each stipendiary post as Green, Amber or Red. In summary, **Green** would mean this post is of strategic importance and is to be retained (or filled if vacant). **Amber** means this post is desirable and should be retained if finances permit but other options for enabling ministry could be considered. **Red** means this post is unlikely to be filled with a full-time stipendiary incumbent and other options for enabling ministry should be considered. This is a deliberately simple and subjective assessment to start the ball rolling. Please note, this coding is about stipendiary posts and is not an assessment of parishes or benefices – many of which are thriving with other patterns of ordained and lay ministry.

In order to encourage reimagining ministry for mission, the maximum number of 'green' posts across the diocese should be restricted to 150. This is 25% below the affordable number determined in 2019 and is a reasonable worse-case scenario for long-term affordability. By limiting 'green' posts to this number we should not have to repeat this exercise in the foreseeable future.

Once the 'green' posts are agreed, the 'amber' posts can be ranked in each deanery to determine those which will be retained subject to overall affordability. Thus, we expect a significant number of 'amber' posts to be retained when the 2025 number of posts (215) is reached at the end of 2021.

There can be flexibility between deaneries to allow Archdeacons and Bishops to provide for particular mission opportunities. Such changes would need agreement by Area Mission and Pastoral Committees or the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, as appropriate.

Archdeacons are asked to produce an initial coding of posts in each of their deaneries by the end of July. This will allow refinement at AMPC and DMPC leading to a plan that can be ratified by Synod in November 2020.

Some implementation, where there is agreement between all parties, can begin immediately, subject to the approval of the bishops and CEO. This includes making appointments to 'green' posts and initiating any necessary pastoral reorganisation needed to close 'red' posts currently in vacancy.

We recognise that a simple allocation of posts into three categories may not be sufficient to record the effects of, for example, potential pastoral reorganisation or the deployment of time-limited Interim Ministry posts. We plan to develop more detailed guidance in the coming days so that a consistent approach can be used across the diocese.

5. ACHIEVING THE REDUCTION IN POSTS

Once the plan for stipendiary posts is agreed, work can then begin on any necessary pastoral reorganisation of parishes and a range of options can be explored for those incumbents who are in posts that will not be retained beyond the end of 2021. These options will be explored sensitively, confidentially, pastorally and vocationally in individual conversations with bishops and archdeacons.

It is expected that in most instances a mutually agreed plan can be put in place. However, there may be instances where financial support will be needed to enable an incumbent to follow a different vocational pathway and, in the last resort, some Common Tenure posts may have to be made redundant. We anticipate that the Church Commissioners will consider grants for such transformation costs where necessary.

6. APPROVAL SOUGHT

Diocesan Synod is invited to NOTE this paper and SUPPORT the actions proposed, subject to formal AGREEMENT in November 2020.