

DIOCESAN SYNOD

Title: **FROM SUBSIDY TO SUSTAINABILITY**
Author: **BISHOP OF CHELMSFORD AND CEO**
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I. CONTEXT

The issues of sustainability faced by the Church of England have come into stark relief over recent months, both locally and across the country. We are deeply grateful for the generous giving that has funded ministry across the Diocese of Chelmsford over many years but with smaller congregations in some places and the removal of national subsidies things have to change. We need to find a sustainable way forward where our mutual support within the Diocese funds all of our ministry provision. There is no need for panic but decisive action is required now to avoid a resourcing crisis in the near future.

Bishop Stephen spoke powerfully about the challenges facing our Diocese in his March 2019 Presidential Address and over the past year we have been on a journey of prayerful reflection and consultation as we grapple with the question of how to address a growing general fund deficit. Proposals in three key areas: ministry deployment, process development and communication, were brought to Diocesan Synod in November for discussion. This paper seeks to build on the constructive and insightful feedback from this debate by submitting a revised set of proposals for decision.

2. FEEDBACK FROM DIOCESAN SYNOD

The debate at November Diocesan Synod enabled a wide range of views to be expressed with over twenty individual contributions from members. This was a valuable opportunity to hear first hand the very real pain being experienced at a local level due to financial pressures and the potential implications of the draft proposals on all forms of ministry.

Five key themes have emerged from this feedback and have reshaped the revised policy being tabled for decision:

i) **Cost of Ministry:** *“The £80,000 figure is absurdly high”*

The figure of £80,000 per annum required to fund a benefice with a full time stipendiary priest and a congregation of a hundred was viewed to be a significant blockage to the discussion about sustainability.

ii) Stewardship: *“Giving is an act of worship not a payment for services rendered”*

A number of comments focussed on the importance of generous giving as part of our day-to-day discipleship and the need to invest in resources and teaching which could increase the levels of serving with accountability within the area of finance. There was also a suggestion made that we should facilitate coordinated prayer across the Diocese given the strategic importance of this issue.

iii) Vacancy policy: *“The process flow looks punitive” “What about growth?”*

Whilst some members of Synod welcomed the clarity and simplicity of the process flow, others felt that it looked punitive: it risked showing stipendiary ministers as a financial burden and devaluing other forms of ministry (e.g. Lay and Self-Supporting). A question was also raised about how plans for mission and growth fitted within the proposed policy.

iv) Mission and Ministry Units (MMU’s) and Deaneries: *“How do the financial sustainability plans affect MMU formation?” “How does this relate to Deanery plans?”*

The original drivers for MMU’s formation were the need for sustainable structures to support a forecast shortage of stipendiary clergy and the desire that no minister should exercise ministry alone. Now that financial sustainability is a major consideration, questions were raised regarding the impact on MMU formation and the interface with Deaneries.

v) Mechanics: *“What about parishes paying share out of reserves?” “New share process not working”*

A series of concerns were expressed regarding the acute financial pressures being experienced at a parish level with many smaller congregations struggling to cope with expensive building maintenance and others paying share out of reserves which are rapidly diminishing. There was also frustration expressed with the mechanics of the new share scheme.

Overall, there was a strong sense of agreement that we face a significant problem which isn’t going away, it is a painful issue that we would all prefer not to have to face and there is no “silver bullet” which will fix everything. Since the Synod debate, there have been no alternative solutions proposed for further exploration.

3. REVISED PROPOSALS

i) Cost of Ministry

A revised articulation of ministry costs has been developed which distinguishes between direct and shared costs:

The direct cost of a full time stipendiary minister is £51,000 per year and includes stipend, pension and housing maintenance. The direct costs associated with a House for Duty post or a Self-supporting Minister are significantly less.

The shared costs of being the Church in Essex and East London total £8m per year and are made up as follows:

- £4.2m for future ministry training, especially for the provision of curates and training of ordinands
- £1.3m for ministry leadership including Archdeacons, Area Teams and Area Dean support
- £2.5m for essential and mandatory services covering areas such as safeguarding, DAC, schools work, finance and governance

This seems like a big number but equates to £5 per person per week given current congregation sizes. A new booklet “Reimagining Ministry: Counting the Cost” has been produced which uses a narrative based approach along with striking hand painted graphics to explain how our direct and shared costs support ministry across the Diocese.

ii) Stewardship

A day of prayer was organised for 23rd February with resources made available on the diocesan website including a short video from Bishop Stephen, a prayer, a leaflet, a podcast sermon on the theme of giving and a feedback area so that parishes could share their reflections from the day. Feedback has been gathered and consideration will be given as to how we can learn from and build on this initial prayer event.



At the beginning of March, the national church announced a new scheme to fund giving advisors in Dioceses across the country. The aim is to resource a post which can work alongside diocesan leadership teams to preach on generosity, lead on projects that facilitate effective giving (such as the Parish Giving Scheme, contactless giving machines etc.) and provide stewardship resources for use in parishes. The Diocese of Chelmsford will be in the first wave of applications for funding to support a stewardship advisor.

Following the successful pilot of roadshows in the Barking area on the subject of financial sustainability and generous giving it is recommended that the new Colchester and Bradwell Mission and Ministry Advisors work with the Area Teams to develop a communications plan which is tailored to their Episcopal Area.

iii) Vacancy Management and Ministry Deployment Policy

When a vacancy is in view, the Archdeacon will initiate a structured conversation with the MMU¹ about what sort of ministry provision is realistic given current resources and future development plans.

Inputs

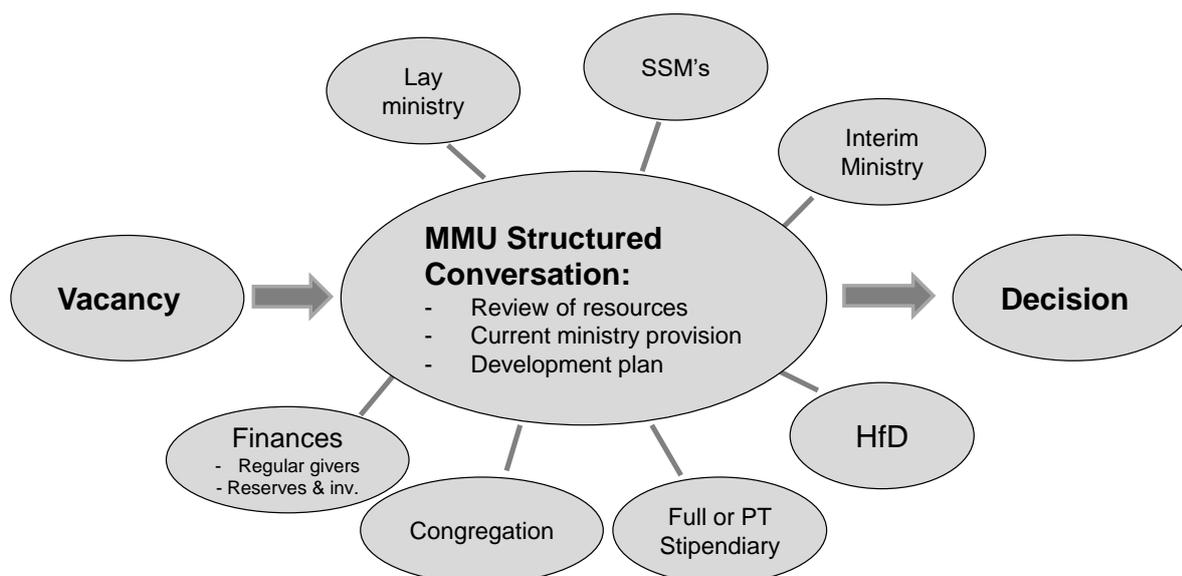
Ahead of this conversation, the MMU leadership will be encouraged to reflect on 3 key areas:

- Current ministry provision: how are lay, self-supporting and stipendiary ministers deployed across the MMU?
- Current resources: how many people are in each congregation, how many are regular givers and what financial reserves or investments are available? What Low Income Community grants are received by way of mutual support?
- Future development plans: what are the mission priority areas for the MMU and how are benefices planning to develop their ministry over the medium term?

To assist in this process of reflection the following tools will be made available: a summary of attendance and financial information for the MMU, a conversation guide with a list of suggested questions and a Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) self-assessment analysis framework (see appendix 3).

Conversation

Participation in the dialogue process will be at the discretion of the Archdeacon but will typically include the MMU leader, Churchwardens, the Area Dean and Lay Chair.



¹ In response to a proposal made to the Barking AMPC, we recognise that in a few Deaneries it may be appropriate for the structured conversation to take place at Deanery rather than at MMU level. This option will be open on request from the Deanery and at the discretion of the Archdeacon concerned, in consultation with the Area Dean and Lay Chair.

Where an MMU is not covering its direct ministry costs (£51,000 per annum for a full time stipendiary priest), after any Low Income Community grant has been taken into account, and not making a contribution to shared costs it can no longer be assumed that there will be a like-for-like replacement. A recommendation on the shape of future ministry provision and an explanation of how it will be financed will be made by the Area Bishop, Archdeacon, Area Dean and Lay Chair to the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee (DMPC).

Outcomes

The possible outcomes from the structured conversation will include:

- **Lay Ministry or SSM:** a reimagining of ministry where Lay or Self-Supporting Ministry will take a key leadership role
- **Interim Ministry:** appointment of an Interim Minister given the potential for turnaround
- **Part Time:** appointment of a House for Duty post, a part time stipendiary priest or sharing of a full time minister across the MMU or benefice
- **Full Time Stipendiary:** given availability of sufficient financial resources to sustain this type of ministry
- **Closure:** in some instances the harsh realities of unsustainable congregations and dwindling resources may lead to a recommendation of closure

A number of the above outcomes would require some form of pastoral re-organisation, may take some time to implement and might require significant pastoral support from the clergy and lay leadership team.

Timescales

For the majority of vacancies, a three month notice period is provided by the outgoing priest. Under the recent changes to The Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986, the Bishop can set a “Start Date” for the appointment process which is up to three months after a vacancy occurs. This provides a window of up to six months in which to manage the structured conversation and reach a recommendation on future ministry provision. If pastoral re-organisation is required the right of presentation can be suspended by the Bishop, subject to the necessary consultation and consents, at any time during the vacancy. For more details on the changes to the Measure please see appendix 4.

In some circumstances, e.g. planned retirement of an incumbent, it will be possible to have a conversation well ahead of a vacancy arising and in these instances the Archdeacon will use the additional time available to facilitate the process. Diocesan Synod passed a motion in March 2019 stating that all parishes should be in an MMU by the end of 2021. During the transitional period, vacancies may arise in a benefice which is not part of an MMU. In these circumstances the process will run in exactly the same way but with the focus of the structured conversation being at benefice level rather than MMU level. In some instances it may be helpful for the Deanery to support this conversation with a benefice as they move towards joining an MMU.

iv) MMU's and Deaneries

Deaneries were invited to attend an MMU Consultation Day on Tuesday 3 March to consider issues of ministry for mission in the light of the growing expectation that with the removal of national subsidies we need to find a mutually supportive and sustainable way of funding ministry at a local level. The specific aims were to:

- Share progress and learning about MMU formation and operation so far, and
- Discern what principles are needed for the effective formation and functioning of MMUs in the future.

Over 120 people attended with representation from most Deaneries. The day was expertly facilitated by Nicky McGinty and participants engaged with the process with energy and positivity. Participants valued the opportunity to meet others from different contexts around the Diocese. The day finished with Deanery groups meeting together to plan their own next steps. Some of the key insights from the day are highlighted below:

Mission: It is very encouraging that the objective and priority of missional engagement for MMUs is both understood and felt to be their overarching purpose and longing.

Sustainability: This word features in the original MMU Guidance and now carries greater weight with the expectations of covering ministry costs. However, some perceive the word negatively as mere survival. Having a more positive objective for each church and MMU that is associated with health, vitality and growth would be preferable.

Principles: The current principles for the formation and operation of MMUs were generally affirmed. There is still a minority view that MMUs are a questionable idea but no alternative proposals have been offered and the majority view is that we must get on and finish the task. Suggested new/additional principles for AMPCs to consider include:

- a. Enabling the gifts of the whole people of God
- b. MMU involvement in the appointment of new clergy
- c. Cross-licensing of clergy across an MMU/Deanery
- d. Including consideration of the environment and the 5th Mark of Mission
- e. Greater emphasis on Discipleship (recognising the counter-cultural nature of the Sermon on the Mount)
- f. Focus on the abundance and generosity of God's provision, not our perceived lack of resources.
- g. Increasing expectation of MMU accountability and mutual monitoring.

Finance. There was considerable enthusiasm to separate issues of finance and parish share from the missional and pastoral aspects of MMU formation and operation. Issues of ministerial availability and deployment mean that these issues cannot be entirely separated. However, consideration could be given to enable Archdeacons to determine the best local arrangements to enable parish share allocation and vacancy conversations to be held at either MMU or Deanery-level.

These insights will be submitted to Bishop's Council, Mission and Pastoral Committees and Deaneries for further consideration.

If agreed, this ministry deployment policy will be a step change for the Diocese and will also enable us to be realistic about how we plan for a sustainable and mutually supportive future. However, it remains the case that a properly owned and considered Deanery plan, with every parish, benefice and new Christian community being part of an MMU, is the best way to ensure sustainability and growth into the future. We therefore urge each Deanery not to wait until there is a vacancy to begin this thinking, but to anticipate the changes that may be around the corner for some parishes and amend their plans accordingly.

We don't want any parish in the Diocese to be either ignorant or despairing of these developments. If agreed, it can form the foundation of future planning in the Deanery with immediate effect.

v) Mechanics

The new share scheme introduced in 2016 has experienced a number of significant challenges:

- MMU formation has taken much longer than expected resulting in the transitional benefice model continuing for far longer than planned
- The offer based system piloted for eleven early MMU's has not been successful: it has resulted in £250,000 a year less in giving and an unsustainable level of bilateral negotiation with central teams
- Deanery officers feel disempowered by the new system and their valuable local knowledge has been lost in the process
- The focus on cost of ministry has led to many benefices who are paying less feeling discouraged and many who are paying more seeking reductions in their share contribution

It is important that the share process supports the vacancy policy described above and reflects our values of mutual support as the Church of England in Essex and East London. Given the scale of work involved, it is proposed that an interim solution for 2021 is submitted to May Finance Committee and June Synod for approval and that, in parallel, a revised long term scheme is designed.

4. APPROVAL SOUGHT

Diocesan Synod is invited to APPROVE the following motion:

“That this Synod approve the policy for “Vacancy Management and Ministry Deployment” to facilitate a financially sustainable and mutually supportive future for the Diocese of Chelmsford.”

Further work will continue in the areas of communication and stewardship: learning from the MMU workshop will be fed back to Bishop's Council and a proposal for an interim 2021 share process will be developed for May Finance Committee and June Synod. It is proposed that the new policy is reviewed after 12 months and a report provided to Synod in 2021.

5. APPENDICES

5.1 Diocesan Synod November 2019 – Proposals for Discussion



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5.2 “Reimagining Ministry: Counting the Cost” booklet

Copies available via website:

<https://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/reimagining-ministry>

5.3 Structured Conversation Input Documents



Example VA
report-October 2019.structured conversati



SWOT and

5.4 Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986 – The Changes



Briefing Note
Patronage (Benefices)