

Coventry Diocesan Synod – 15 MARCH 2025 – Minutes

A meeting of the Coventry Diocesan Synod, which took place on **Saturday 15 March** at **9.30am** at **St John the Evangelist, 205 Warwick Road, Kenilworth, CV8 1HY**.

*The meeting of the Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Coventry, opened under the Standing Orders 2009
Bishop Tim Thornton took the Chair*

1. Opening prayer and worship

Led by Helen Bryant, lay chaplain to Diocesan Synod

2. Notices and apologies for absence

Apologies: 9 from the house of Clergy, 21 from the house of Laity and 1 in attendance. The meeting was quorate.

3. Minutes (DS 25-02)

The minutes of the Diocesan Synod meeting held on 16 November 2024 were **approved**.

4. Presidential address and welcome

Bishop Tim introduced himself and shared a brief autobiography before addressing synod on the basis of making the good confession; *have courage to speak out, speak up and confess the faith*. He thanked everyone for their continued work for confessing the faith across the diocese and cautioned on the dangers of just looking inwards in this very anxious time for the whole world, when we should be praying for peace, learning from the Makin Report and recognising that we need each other. The full address can be read [here](#).

The Chair of the House of Laity, Phil Sowards, took the chair

5. Annual Safeguarding Update (DS 25-03 a, b)

Trevor Worsfold, Interim Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Scrutiny Group (DSSG), provided the Annual Safeguarding Update, speaking to DS 25-03a. He highlighted that the DSSG has grown in number yet recruitment continues for a representative from Adult and Child Services. Work is commencing on a new strategy based on the National Safeguarding Standards and Quality Assurance Framework. Coventry Diocese and the Cathedral will undergo a joint INEQE audit against these standards in July 2026. The area that will need the most development is the voices of young people and engagement with survivors. Leadership culture, risk assessment and management will also be evaluated whilst implementing recommendations that have come from the reports this year. A major action that has already occurred is the change of role of Sarah Price, who is now the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO), in line with the IICSA recommendations for increasing independence. As DSO, Sarah can act independently without permission from the Bishop, and has supervision from the National Safeguarding Team. Sarah's job title is now Director of Safeguarding. In February, General Synod debated options for managing safeguarding. General Synod approved model 3 for now, to outsource the work of the National Safeguarding Team and consider the implications for dioceses of moving towards the full independence outlined in model 4. Trevor praised and thanked the Coventry team for their professionalism.

Sarah Price, Director of Safeguarding, introduced the Safeguarding Annual Report DS 25-03b emphasising that the capacity of the diocesan safeguarding team has been invested in so that it can grow to meet demand. Amending Canon 42 has been implemented and the Archbishop's Council confirmed on 29th January that Coventry have reached the requirements for the change to a DSO as explained by Trevor.

To date, referrals are still at an increased level following the Makin review. The training offer from the diocese is increasing with a programme of in person training planned for 2025. The format of the Domestic Abuse Awareness Course is being revised following feedback and the course is no longer a requirement for all PCC members. There is a forum for Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs), they are offered drop in sessions and a service of celebration for PSOs is being planned for 2025. Work is underway to address and support PSO vacancies. At the heart of all of the work is the commitment to make our diocese a safer place and to protect the most vulnerable.

Questions and comments

Clarification was sought on the graphs in DS 25-03b: Graph 2 shows the new referrals made in each month which are Red Amber Green rated, graph 3 show how many cases are open in each month and are also RAG rated.

How does the team sustain supervision and deal with trauma?

Professional supervisor meetings occur every 6 to 8 weeks with a social worker for Sarah and she provides supervision for the team which includes recognition of trauma. Diocesan staff have access to counselling and there are regular reflective peer conversations within the team to support each other. It was questioned by other members whether this was enough and Sarah assured that this is being reflected on by the team. Further concern was raised as to whether the Safeguarding Team is adequately resourced and Sarah responded that this is also being considered nationally as well the Coventry team's workload being monitored and reviewed constantly to ensure resource is where it needs to be and mitigations are put in place if needed.

It was expressed that social worker supervision would be beneficial for all clergy. Rob Harrison is exploring options to support more with this aspect and also support for PSOs is being investigated.

6. Reflection on recent national events

Claire McArthur, Chair of the House of Clergy introduced the opportunity for Synod to reflect on recent events within the life of the church including Church Safeguarding – Post-Makin Report, Archbishop of Canterbury – Leadership Priorities and Women in the Church – Safety and Flourishing. She highlighted that at a local level there are also positive stories such as 140 people, including refugees, attending a Christmas Day lunch and 700 people attending a nativity at Charter House.

Synod were asked to reflect in small groups, using these conversation starters if helpful:

How do you personally feel about recent events?

What responses have you seen within your churches?

Has the Makin report addressed the situation adequately?

What does the Church of England need to do now?

Are there particular concerns or insights you feel should be raised as we moved forward?

What do we, in our own Churches and as a Diocese, need to do now?

The Chairs of the Houses of Laity and Clergy invited Synod to discuss the recent national events and the impact of these on their local churches and communities in small groups and provide written feedback, a short verbal feedback session was held:

- It was clarified that all Parish Safeguarding Officers receive induction training when they are appointed and complete all safeguarding trainings up to leadership level.
- It was observed that there needs to be mutual understanding between specialists and those in the field coupled with the need for proportionality.
- The Mother's Union are working across the dioceses on the issue of domestic violence.
- There is little diversity within our board of trustees.

- The Makin Report effects an older generation who have moved on.
- Generation Z are coming, seeking the new and rebelling in a different way against different generations.
- Rugby Deanery are discussing the possibilities of a Deanery Safeguarding Officer to help with PSO vacancies.

7. General Synod feedback

Jonathan Jee provided feedback on the February 2025 General Synod session where good ministry debates took place on encouraging ordinands from working class backgrounds, involving young people in synod, racial justice and sports and wellbeing ministry. The financial update included proposals for the funding formulas for the next triennium, making a national scheme for funding ordinands, removing the postcode lottery and plans to improve clergy stipends to make up for years of falling behind inflation. Legislation items included the replacement of the Clergy Discipline Measure, after nearly 3 years this is almost at final approval. Major work is ongoing for the National Church Governance Measure, aiming to simply and coordinate the different bodies more efficiently. Consideration of the Mission and Pastoral Measure has started, considering where the financial burden of fallow buildings should fall. Jonathan noted that Gill Frigerio sends her apologies for not convening a group in order to bring Diocesan Synod views to the debates around the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC) and Vacancy in See. These works resulted in changes to representations; no more than one person from the same worshipping community can now be on a CNC. The session was dominated by safeguarding, the result was that model 3 was selected, national independent scrutiny will be introduced and further consideration is to be given to diocesan level independent scrutiny. Jonathan expressed that he feels that General Synod has made the right decision. Little time was given to Living in Love and Faith (LLF), the theological work has not been completed yet. There is a lot of frustration and Diocesan Synod are due to be asked to debate the matter with resources provided to aid constructive debate.

Questions and comments:

Did General Synod give thought to the Anglican Communion as a whole – how should the CofE respond with the wider community?

Not this time, there are always representatives from the wider Anglican communion. The Archbishop elect from Canada spoke on reconciliation work with indigenous people in Canada and there was a report from the Archbishop of Estonia where their strategy is working out what it is to be a church in a war zone. There is a huge range of expertise in General Synod.

There is engagement with both of these areas of work through the Cross of Nails.

The Chair of the House of Clergy, Revd Canon Claire McArthur took the chair

8. **Our Shared Future – New Worshipping Communities and Healthy Churches**

Revd Jenny Irvine, Director of New Worshipping Communities and Healthy Churches, explained that new worshipping communities do not come out of nowhere, they are normally the result of deep community interactions. Jenny shared some success stories of new worshipping communities forming, emphasising that a new worshipping community is new because it is reaching people not currently in the church community, as our mission is to be the church in every community.

The CofE state that a new worshipping community must have two or more marks of mission and meet once a month or more and, in this diocese, they must have priestly oversight. Many fresh expressions are new worshipping communities. There is a target for there to be 150 new worshipping communities by 2030, so far there are 30 and there is great awareness to ensure that healthy new worshipping communities are planted. The Greenhouse pilot has led to there now being three Greenhouse projects and story sharing is to be developed to celebrate success and make projects

more diverse. A major challenge is capacity but we must also ensure that there is balance between action and prayer.

Revd Clive Hicks, Healthy Churches Development Enabler, spoke of how the uptake of NCD Healthy Church Surveys is reducing, thinking is moving on and needs to reflect the challenges of today. Rewilding captures the agenda and is a great metaphor for who is missing from churches, creation care is a way to reimagine church life. Church growth is being supported by projects such as Myriad and Greenhouse. He shared stories of this work in the diocese and highlighted that healthy street life is like Jesus' work in Galilee and that the 'Secret Garden' exists in the form of spiritual companions. The diocesan prayer diary keeps the big themes in prayer.

Jenny and Clive asked these questions to be considered in silent reflection:

Where are you?

Where is your church?

Synod were asked to discuss the following in small groups and provide written feedback on postcards.

Which healthy new worshipping communities can we learn from?

What barriers are there to planting healthy new worshipping communities?

Brief verbal feedback on barriers was welcomed:

- Knowing what is out there, nationally and locally.
- Resources – what can we do to free people to enable them to do?
- Space – new estates do not have community buildings so having a physical presence is challenging.
- We need to know where new housing is being built and what the population is.
- If we are to plant we need resources/instructions.
- There are a lot of messy churches – there can be replication of resources.
- There is a lack of children and family workers.
- What is the leadership pipeline?

9. Our Shared Future – Renewing the Environment (DS 25-04 a, b)

Revd Tim Cockell provided an update on the Eco Diocese Silver criteria; The bronze award was achieved in 2018 and the Net Zero Action Plan includes a target to achieve silver by the end of 2026. Godfrey Armitage, Diocesan Environment Officer, is confident that the required number of churches involved with Eco Church will be achieved [only 3 more churches need to achieve a bronze award to fully meet this criterion]. It was clarified that churches will not lose their achieved awards following the introduction of the new Eco Church Survey for churches. Next steps include the development of environmental training for lay and ordained ministry, deanery environmental reps, diocesan staff and others. The DBF's Investment Policy is to be reviewed and updated. Work has started with land agents on managing diocesan land (Glebe) for biodiversity and climate change, this is linked with criteria 4, the Diocesan Environmental Policy, DS 25-04b, which has been updated to meet the Silver Eco Diocese requirements. There are documents underpinning the Environment Policy such as the parish guide which is being redeveloped by the Diocesan Environment Group and the Net Zero Action Plan. DS 25-04b has been reviewed by the Diocesan Environmental Group and Bishop's Council have reviewed the Policy and recommend that it is adopted by Diocesan Synod.

Revd Tim Cockell moved the motion that: This Synod:

- *Notes the Eco Diocese Silver criteria*
- *Adopts the Environment Policy – DS 25-04b*

Carried with 1 abstention

10. Diocesan Trustees (DS 25-05)

Jacqueline Ladds explained: The Diocesan Trustees are a separate charity of custodian trustees; Diocesan Synod appoints some of the members. The purpose of the Diocesan Trustees is to ensure parishes work in the best interests of the parish and within charity law for transactions. It is recognised that there is limited diversity amongst members and discussions on how to increase diversity and improve the recruitment process are ongoing with the secretary, Mary Allanson. Two members are nominated by the Bishop, Jacqueline Ladds is one of these nominees.

Diocesan Synod are invited to appoint Chris Jones, Stephen Davenport, Robert Morton, Rev'd Steve Gold, Rev'd Jim Canning, John Elton and Stephen Wyatt as members of the Coventry Diocesan Trustees. Membership will run from the date of appointment until the Diocesan Synod meeting held in July 2028.

Vote:

For: 51

Against: 2

Abstentions: 14

Approved

11. Questions received under Standing Order 69

Four questions were received, written responses were circulated to all members. Questioners were given the opportunity to ask a supplementary question:

Question 1 supplementary question from Hannah Wilson:

Q: Does this mean that Bishop's Council/the DBF have agreed to accept donations from the Ephesians Fund?

A: Following discussions with the Bishops and Chair of the Coventry Diocesan Board of Finance, there are churches currently paying their Parish Share through the Ephesians Fund. This is being kept under review and there will be further discussions on this position after Bishop Sophie has started her public ministry in the Diocese.

Question 2 supplementary question from Revd Sarah Edmonds Maguire:

Q: What plans are in place to communicate the option to include the PLF tag on A Church Near You.?

A: The matter will be raised with the communications team.

12. 2025 Meeting Dates

Tues 8 July (eve), Sat 22 Nov (am)

Bishop Tim thanked St John's for their hospitality and closed the meeting with prayers and a blessing.

Phil Swards thanked Bishop Tim, the meeting closed at 12:15.