

**SPECIAL AGENDA IV**

**DIOCESAN SYNOD MOTIONS**

**THE FUTURE OF CHURCH OF ENGLAND RETREAT HOUSES**

**Background note by the Secretary General**

1. The National Church Institutions support Diocesan Retreat Houses and many other Anglican and other Christian facilities and centres by making regular use of them for conferences, courses, residential meetings, and selection conferences.

2. The size and range of facilities available offers considerably not only among the retreat houses but also more generally. The choice whether to use a diocesan retreat house or conference centre, the St Katherine's Foundation in Limehouse, premises owned by various of the religious communities, the non-denominational centres at High Leigh and Swanwick, the Roman Catholic centres at Hinsley Hall, Leeds and the All Saints Pastoral Centre at London Colney, Hertfordshire or indeed other locations does, therefore, largely turn on the scale of the meeting, the range of facilities required and other practical considerations, including costs.

3. The following illustrations give some examples of recent and current use. They are by no means exhaustive.

4. The *Archbishops' Council* holds its two annual residential meetings of the Council at the Sheffield Diocesan Conference Centre at Whirlow Grange. The *Crown Nominations Commission* regularly uses four diocesan retreat houses for its meetings. The *Liturgical Commission* holds three residential meetings annually, all in diocesan retreat houses.

5. The *Ministry Division* uses predominantly two retreat houses for selection conferences: Shallowford (Lichfield Diocese) and Bishop Woodford House (Ely Diocese). The decision to use two the retreat houses was the result of a full tendering process which took costs and the fact that the two houses in question took specific steps to address the particular needs of the Advisory Panels into account. Exceptionally, when there is particular pressure, the Ministry Division uses four other retreat houses and two other establishments.

6. The *Mission and Public Affairs Division* currently uses four diocesan retreat centres, three Church of England theological colleges, and a number of other denominational or non-denominational Christian conference centres. The *Council for Christian Unity* uses diocesan retreat houses regularly for residential meetings, including those with representatives of other churches. Some use is also made of the conference centres of the other denominations.

7. The *Women Bishops Legislative Drafting Group* had three residential meetings, all in diocesan retreat houses. The House of Bishops Standing Committee has met residentially at the Royal Foundation of St Katherine. The Clergy Terms of Service Group met at the Chelmsford Diocesan retreat House.

8. For reasons of subsidiarity there has up to now been no national policy on the provision of retreat houses, some of which are owned by the dioceses and others recognised and supported by them. A review commissioned by the Synod could not cover non-Anglican houses and centres though would presumably need to take them into account in making any recommendations for the sustainability and development of the remaining retreat houses.

9. The resource implications of conducting a review are set out in the financial memorandum.

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