

The Church of England has welcomed a Bill published today by the Government aimed at speeding up the introduction of the first women diocesan bishops into the House of Lords.

Bishop Tim Stevens, Bishop of Leicester and convenor of the bishops in the House of Lords, welcoming the Bill, said the presence of women diocesan bishops would "enrich and strengthen" the voice of the bishops in the House of Lords.

He said: "We know that women bishops will enrich and strengthen the leadership of the Church of England and we are very confident that they will also enrich and strengthen our voice in the House of Lords.

"We have reason to suppose that this is supported from all sides of both Houses and we are grateful to the business managers for making time to get this minor amendment to the law in place as soon as possible."

The Rt Hon Sir Tony Baldry MP, Second Church Estates Commissioner, said: "There was very widespread support across Parliament for the consecration of women bishops in the Church of England and I think there will be a widespread welcome to legislation that will enable women who are diocesan bishops to become Lords Spiritual at the earliest possible opportunity."

Under current rules, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Bishops of London, Durham and Winchester are entitled to sit in the House of Lords from the start of their appointments.

The Lords Spiritual (Women) Bill makes provision for vacancies among the remaining 21 places, which are normally filled according to length of service, to be filled as they arise by eligible female diocesan bishops. The provision would remain in place for 10 years, equivalent to two fixed term Parliaments.

The proposed legislation would not prevent male bishops from entering the House of Lords during this period as vacancies would be filled, as is currently the case, by the longest serving male diocesan bishop if there is no eligible female diocesan bishop in line at that time.

After the end of the 10-year period, the provision made by the Bill would come to an end and the current arrangements under the Bishops Act 1878 for determining which bishops are to fill vacancies in the House of Lords would be restored.

The full bill can be read at:

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2014-15/lordsspiritualwomen.html>

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