



The House of Bishops met for its first meeting in 2021 on Tuesday 19th January via Zoom.

The bishops began with discussion and an acknowledgment of the ongoing seriousness of the pandemic, the rising death toll and the ongoing difficulty, sadness and loss faced by many. As a House and in breakout groups, the bishops continued to be mindful of the damage Covid-19 continues to wreak in our communities but expressed hope that the vaccines now being rolled out offer light at the end of this tunnel.

The House then turned its attention to the current and multi-year post-Covid environment, with broad discussion over the potential long-term impact of Covid-19 in a number of key areas. The House recognised the opportunities afforded by new kinds of engagement through the internet while regretting that many communities could not meet physically or in familiar ways, while underscoring the importance of Holy Communion for individuals and churches.

The bishops welcomed the creative, innovative ways ministers were finding to extend the Church's outreach by streaming worship online and by developing other ways of building community online. The House affirmed it would be premature to make decisions on the eucharist in a digital medium and the administration and reception of Holy Communion, particularly in a time of national pandemic and resolved to undertake further theological and liturgical study and discussion on these issues over the coming months.

In the afternoon, the House was updated by the Bishop of London in her role as Chair of the Recovery Group. Bishop Sarah addressed the impact of Covid-19 over the Christmas season and the Church's ongoing participation in the current national vaccination programme. She also reaffirmed that throughout the pandemic, churches will continue to work with other faith communities, local groups and volunteers to support their communities and local health providers. The House also heard that while many churches have decided to offer digital services only for the time being, while others are continuing to remain open in a Covid-secure way for individual prayer and public worship. The circumstances in each place will inform a local decision.

The House then received updates from the Chair of each of the Emerging Church workstreams: From the Bishop of Manchester in his capacity as Chair of the Coordinating group, the Archbishop of York as Chair of the Vision and Strategy workstream, The Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich as Chair of the Transforming Effectiveness workstream (whose purpose is to make the operations of the National Church Institutions more effective) and the Bishops of Leeds as Chair of the Governance Review Group. The Governance Review Group plans to publish a consultation document which will suggest a number of options for future governance models and will consult widely.

The House then received an update on the Resourcing Ministerial Formation Review outlining the process so far, and how this fits within the wider vision emerging for the Church of England and the current challenges facing the Church. The Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich addressed the House which took note and agreed on the direction of travel of the report, with preliminary recommendations expected by

Summer 2021 and final recommendations later in the year.

The House was then informed on progress towards independent oversight for Safeguarding, further to the House's December discussion of this issue. Further engagement on this issue, including importantly with survivors of abuse, will take place in the coming weeks. The House heard from the Acting Director of Safeguarding, as well as the Director of Mission and Public Affairs who responded to questions from the House. The House was informed that the Interim Support Scheme has progressed well since it began actively dealing with cases in October 2020. The scheme has been developed collaboratively by the NST with important inputs from Legal and Finance, and, most importantly, survivor voices.

The Bishop of Rochester then spoke to the House regarding the Implementation and Dialogue Group Report. The House agreed for the Report to be considered further at a subsequent meeting.

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