

General Synod is to hold a special online meeting next month examining challenges facing the Church and world in light of the coronavirus pandemic followed by a formal session in the spring, as a result of the current lockdown restrictions.

Members will discuss questions including the future shape of the Church in the wake of Covid-19, independent oversight of safeguarding and proposals by a Commission of the Church of England towards addressing the Housing Crisis at a meeting held entirely remotely on February 27.

Legislation and other business which can only be addressed in a formal session will be discussed slightly later – expected to be from April 23 to April 24. The two meetings will replace the planned group of sessions which would have taken place from February 26 to March 1.

The decision was taken by the officers of Synod – the Archbishops, Prolocutors of Canterbury and York of the House of Clergy, and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the House of Laity with the support of the Chair of the General Synod Business Committee.

It was taken in order to follow the Government's call for people to stay at home to limit the spread of the coronavirus. The Officers of General Synod agreed that Synod chairs and the staff needed to manage formal proceedings should not be required to travel or gather together at the moment.

The decision to hold an extra meeting means Synod will be able to discuss vital questions facing the church and society in February and still address legislative business in the spring, without having to delay discussions to the July group of sessions.

Synod will also have an opportunity to engage in detail with the recently published Living in Love and Faith resources on human identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage later in the year.

The Revd Canon Simon Butler, Prolocutor of Canterbury, said: "Clearly the Covid-19 situation needs to improve before we can ask staff and chairs of Synod to gather together or travel anywhere safely.

"What matters most is that we do the essential business we need to in the coming months and we all can hope that this will be much safer after Easter."

Canon Dr Jamie Harrison, Chair of the House of Laity, said: "Deciding to change the focus of what we can achieve through a virtual Synod has not been easy.

"However, as a medical doctor, I am acutely aware of the need to keep us all safe, not least when I think about our excellent Synod staff and chairs."

The Revd Canon Sue Booy, Chair of the General Synod Business Committee, said: "The February meeting will be focusing on looking ahead to the aftermath of the pandemic and how the Church can help our communities recover.

"I look forward to a formal session at the end of April when we can address some key remaining legislative business prior to July."

