

Dioceses Commission

Episcopal Ministry and Suffragan Sees

Guidance on the Operation of Sections 12 and 17 of the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007

(1) Section 17: Provisions with respect to filling of suffragan sees

1. Section 12 of the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007 is related to section 17. It will therefore be convenient to summarize section 17 first.
2. Under the Dioceses Measure 1978, any proposal to create a new suffragan see or revive a see that had been vacant for more than five years required the approval of the diocesan synod and the General Synod, whereas existing sees could be filled when they fell vacant without any consideration as to whether a suffragan bishop was needed. There was a disincentive to allow sees to remain vacant for a period that might extend to five years, and a possible element of unfairness, in that it was difficult for a diocese with no suffragan see to gain approval for creating one, whereas a diocesan bishop who already had one or more suffragans could fill a suffragan see even in circumstances whereby it might now be unlikely that approval would have been given for creating it.
3. Section 17 of the 2007 Measure removes this discrepancy by requiring that the filling of all vacant suffragan sees (except the See of Dover) should be justified. It also empowers the Dioceses Commission, with the agreement of the Archbishop of the Province, to require the process for creating or reviving a suffragan see to be followed in respect of any vacant see if it considers that the proposal to fill the see requires further consideration. (NB sees held by area bishops in dioceses with Area Schemes under the Dioceses Measure 1978 are suffragan sees and this requirement applies to them.)
4. The procedure for filling one of these sees is set out in section 17 (which is appended at Annex A, together with section 18, to which it refers). It may be summarized as follows:
 - When a suffragan see has become vacant or is shortly to become vacant, the first step is for the bishop to consider whether the see should be filled, taking into account his duty under s. 12 of the Measure to keep under review the provision of episcopal ministry and oversight in the diocese and to consult widely in doing so. (17.1)

- If the bishop thinks that a proposal to fill the see should be considered, he/she consults the diocesan synod (or, if the matter is urgent and it is not practicable to consult the diocesan synod, the bishop's council). (17.2)
- If the bishop then decides that the see should be filled, he/she notifies the Archbishop of the Province and the Dioceses Commission of the proposal and gives reasons for it. (17.2) (*See section 4 of this paper.*)
- The Commission is required to notify the Archbishop and the bishop concerned within two months either that it agrees with the bishop's proposal or that it considers that it requires further consideration. (17.3)
- If the former is the case, or if the Archbishop informs the bishop (within two months) that he does not agree with the Commission's view that it requires further consideration, the bishop may petition the Crown to appoint a new suffragan. (17.4)
- However, if the Commission considers that the proposal needs further consideration and the Archbishop informs the bishop (within two months) that he agrees, the full procedure for creating suffragan sees under section 18 of the Measure will apply, and the proposal will need to be approved by the General Synod. (17.5)

(2) Section 12: Duty of the bishop to keep episcopal ministry under review

5. Section 12 of the Measure reads as follows:

Each bishop of a diocese shall keep under review the provision of episcopal ministry and oversight in his diocese and shall, in carrying out that duty, consult widely such persons and bodies as he thinks fit.
6. A main purpose of this requirement is to ensure that consideration of the need for existing suffragan sees begins before the vacancy arises, in order to limit the delay in filling them which might otherwise result.
7. In the dioceses that have area schemes (eg. Chelmsford, Leeds, Lichfield, London, Oxford, and Southwark) it may be appropriate to review from time to time the operation of the area scheme and the responsibilities that are delegated to area bishops under it, to see whether the provisions of the scheme still meet the needs of the diocese and its mission.
8. Where there is no suffragan, such a review may either point to a need for a suffragan or establish that any need for episcopal ministry to supplement that

of the diocesan bishop is adequately met by use of sharing resources with bishops from neighbouring dioceses and/or the use of honorary assistant bishops. The situation may need to be reviewed from time to time, as both the national and diocesan workload of the diocesan bishop and the demand for specifically episcopal ministry within the diocese are likely to vary over time.

9. **It is for each diocesan bishop to decide how he will comply with the requirement laid down in section 12 of the Measure.** Subject to that, the Commission envisages that, as a minimum, it would involve some consultation beyond the circle of the diocesan bishop and his senior staff every few years about the adequacy of the provision for episcopal ministry and oversight in the diocese. This may form part of a wider periodic consideration of the mission of the diocese, with a view to long-term strategy. The ministerial development reviews of the diocese's bishops may also provide a helpful context in which the provision of episcopal ministry and oversight in the diocese can be kept under review.

(3) Filling existing suffragan sees: the Commission's role

10. Arrangements for the financial support provided by the Church Commissioners for episcopal ministry mean that the amount expended by them have since 1 January 2011 no longer been directly consequent upon the number of bishops in the diocese. The decision to fill a suffragan see or leave it unfilled does not therefore have financial consequences for the Church of England as a whole. The Dioceses Commission therefore does not need to take financial issues into account in considering whether suffragan see should be filled.
11. The Commission does not believe, however, that it would be justified in reducing its statutory role in this matter to a mere formality. It can bring its accumulated experience and understanding of episcopal oversight across the country to bear. A suffragan bishop's ministry is, also, never purely diocesan. All bishops are members of the provincial and national college of bishops. As such, they have a key role in the mission of the Church of England nationally. There is therefore a proper role for a national body in relation to suffragan sees.

(4) Information requested by the Commission

12. Sub-section (2) of section 17 reads as follows: (2) Where, after consulting the diocesan synod or the bishop's council and standing committee, as the case may be, under subsection (1) above, the bishop decides that the vacancy

should be filled he shall notify the archbishop of the province and the Commission of his proposal and give his reasons for it.

13. At this stage the Commission would expect diocesan bishops to consider the intended role of a future suffragan, consulting others in the diocese as appropriate. This is best done through focussing on a draft role description, in particular identifying pan-diocesan roles that the bishop would be filling (even if these may be fine-tuned or adjusted subsequently in the light of the particular skills and experience of whoever is finally appointed). This is part of the process of determining the job weight of the suffragan role and how the post coheres with diocesan strategies and where the post holder would fit within the diocesan team.
14. Dioceses and the need for episcopal ministry within them vary widely. The Commission will wish to assure itself that the role envisaged for the occupant of the see needs to be undertaken by a bishop and that the role of the suffragan bishop beyond the diocese has been borne in mind. Section 17 (1) of the Measure requires the bishop's decision to propose filling the vacancy should take into account his duty under section 12 to keep the provision of episcopal ministry and oversight under review and in doing so consult widely.
15. In giving thought to the intended role of the suffragan the Commission recognises that neither scripture nor tradition provide a blueprint for episcopal ministry, but it would expect that the role would be consonant with what is set out in the Ordinal for the consecration of bishops¹. There are a number of resources available that may be useful reference sources, including
 - *Suffragan Bishops: A House of Bishops' Occasional Paper [GS Misc 733, 2004]*²
 - *'Senior Church Leadership': Report of the Faith & Order Commission [GS1999B, 2015]*³
 - *Papers from the Commission's Episcopal Oversight Symposium in October 2014*⁴
16. It would therefore be helpful if the bishop's letter giving his reasons for proposing to fill the see could include:
 - *a draft role description proposed for the suffragan bishop (which may also refer to existing documents, such as those mentioned in para. 16 below);*

¹ See <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/ordinal/bishops.aspx>

² See <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/40660/gsmisc733suffbps.doc>

³ See <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2249170/gs%201999b%20-%20private%20members%20motion%20senior%20leadership.pdf>

⁴ See <https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/dioceses-commission/suffragan-sees/episcopal-oversight-symposium.aspx>

- *where this may not be self-evident from the summary or from such documents, a theological rationale for the post with an indication of why a bishop is needed to fulfil that role (perhaps by reference to the role of a bishop as set out in the 1662 Ordinal and Common Worship Ordination Services);*
- *an indication of how the ministry of the suffragan bishop is expected to complement that of the diocesan and fit into the overall pattern of episcopal ministry within the diocese;*
- *an indication of the diocesan, regional and national issues that the bishop has taken into account in deciding to fill the see;*
- *reference to some recent consultation within the diocese that fulfils the requirement of sections 12 and 17(1) of the Measure.*

17. Bishops may find it helpful to draw up a brief note of the reasons for filling their suffragan see(s) in the context of a periodic review of the provision of episcopal ministry and oversight (where such a review has indicated a future need for the see). This can then form the basis for a relatively swift reflection, and be amended as necessary, when the vacancy arises, so as to reduce to a minimum any delay that these requirements might otherwise impose.

18. The Commission will find it helpful if the bishop's submission sets a proposal to fill a see in the context of any diocesan mission strategy and how the role relates to that of other members of the diocesan senior team (such as archdeacons). It is suggested that the submission cross-refers to other relevant documentation: examples include:

- an area scheme under the 1978 Measure (where there is one)
- the instrument of delegation to the previous suffragan bishop (where there are episcopal areas but no area scheme under the 1978 Measure and significant changes to the role are not envisaged)
- an early draft of the role specification, or a list of points that the bishop envisages being included in it
- a draft of any information about the context for the suffragan bishop's ministry that might be prepared for candidates.

(5) Response by the Commission

17. The Commission is required to notify the bishop and the archbishop within two months of receiving notification from the bishop of his proposal to fill the vacant see either that it agrees with the proposal or that it believes that the proposal requires further consideration (involving the full procedure for creating a new suffragan see). During this two-month period, the Commission may seek clarification from the bishop of aspects of the reasons for proposing

to fill the see mentioned in his letter. In some cases, it may suggest that the bishop withdraws a submission and submits it in a substantially revised form.

18. Bishops may find it helpful to consult the Secretary of the Commission in advance of the point at which they send their formal notification.
19. Should the Commission approve the filling of the See, it will then be for the diocesan bishop to initiate the appointment process in liaison with the Archbishops' Appointments Secretary.

On behalf of the Commission

MICHAEL CLARKE

Chair

June 2016

*Creation and filling of suffragan sees***17 Provisions with respect to filling of suffragan sees**

(1) Where the bishop is aware that a see of a suffragan bishop has become vacant or is shortly to become vacant and the bishop thinks, after taking into account the duty imposed on him under section 12 above, that a proposal to fill the vacancy should be considered he shall consult the diocesan synod as to whether the vacancy should be filled, unless the bishop is of the opinion that the matter is urgent and it is not practicable to consult the diocesan synod, in which case he may, instead, consult the bishop's council and standing committee of that diocesan synod.

(2) Where, after consulting the diocesan synod or the bishop's council and standing committee, as the case may be, under subsection (1) above, the bishop decides that the vacancy should be filled he shall notify the archbishop of the province and the Commission of his proposal and give his reasons for it.

(3) The Commission, within the period of two months of being notified as provided in subsection (2) above, shall notify the bishop and the archbishop either that it agrees with the bishop's proposal or that it considers that the bishop's proposal requires further consideration.

(4) If the archbishop informs the bishop within the period of two months of being notified by the Commission as provided in subsection (3) above that he agrees with the Commission's view that the bishop's proposal requires further consideration the provisions of subsections (6) and (7) below shall apply.

(5) If the Commission has notified the bishop and the archbishop under subsection (3) above—

(a) that it agrees with the bishop's proposal, or

(b) that it considers that the proposal needs further consideration and the archbishop has informed the bishop that he does not agree with the Commission's view,

then the bishop may petition Her Majesty to exercise her powers to appoint a suffragan bishop to fill the vacancy under the Suffragan Bishops Act 1534 (26 Hen. 8 c. 14).

(6) Where subsection (4) above applies, the Commission shall prepare a statement of the effect of the proposal to fill the vacancy on the mission of the Church of England if implemented and, in consultation with the Commissioners, an estimate of the financial effect of the proposal and report on the proposal to the bishop, including the statement and estimate in its report.

(7) Section 18(4) to (8) below shall apply to a proposal to which subsection (4) above applies as it applies to a draft scheme under that section.

(8) Nothing in this section shall apply to the see of the suffragan bishop of Dover.

18 Provisions with respect to creation of suffragan sees

(1) No bishop of a diocese shall petition Her Majesty in Council to direct under the Suffragans Nomination Act 1888 (51 & 52 Vict. c. 56) that a town in his diocese shall be taken and accepted for a see of a suffragan bishop as if it had been included in the Suffragan Bishops Act 1534 (26 Hen. 8 c. 14) unless his proposal to do so is approved by the diocesan synod and the General Synod.

(2) After consulting (if the bishop is not an archbishop) the archbishop of the province the bishop shall send a copy of his proposal, together with a statement of his reasons for making it, to the Commission for it to report thereon.

(3) On receiving such a proposal, the Commission shall prepare a statement of the effect of the proposal on the mission of the Church of England if implemented and, in consultation with the Commissioners, an estimate of the financial effect of the proposal and shall include the statement and estimate in its report.

(4) The bishop shall consider the report of the Commission on the proposal and if he decides to proceed with it he shall lay the proposal before the diocesan synod for its approval.

(5) A copy of the proposal and of the report of the Commission thereon shall be sent to every member of the diocesan synod at least three weeks before the session at which the proposal is considered.

(6) If the proposal is approved by the diocesan synod, the bishop shall lay the proposal before the General Synod for its approval.

(7) A copy of the proposal and of the report of the Commission thereon shall be sent to every member of the General Synod at least fourteen days before the beginning of the group of sessions at which the proposal is considered.

(8) Where the Business Committee of the General Synod determines that the proposal does not need to be debated by the General Synod then, unless notice is given by a member of the General Synod in accordance with its Standing Orders that that member wishes the proposal to be debated, the proposal shall, for the purposes of subsection (6) above, be deemed to have been approved by the General Synod.