

THE DIOCESES COMMISSION

ANNUAL REPORT 2016

The Dioceses Commission is required to report annually to the General Synod. This is its ninth report.

1. The Commission consists of a Chair and Vice-Chair appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York from among the members of the General Synod; four members elected by the Synod; and four members appointed by the Appointments Committee.

Membership and Staff

2. The membership and staff of the Commission are as follows:

Chair:	Canon Prof. Michael Clarke
Vice-Chair:	The Revd Paul Benfield (Blackburn)
Elected Members:	The Revd Canon Jonathan Alderton-Ford (St Eds & Ips) [to March 2016] Mr Anthony Archer (St Albans) [from June 2016] Mr Malcolm Halliday (Leeds) [from June 2016] The Revd Canon Geoffrey Harbord (Sheffield) Canon Robert Hammond (Chelmsford) [to March 2016] The Revd Dr Robert Munro (Chester) [from June 2016]
Appointed Members:	Mrs Maureen Cole [from June 2016] The Rt Revd Christopher Foster, Bishop of Portsmouth Mrs Lucinda Herklots [to March 2016] The Rt Revd Dame Sarah Mullally, Bishop of Crediton Canon Prof. Hilary Russell
Secretary:	Mr Jonathan Neil-Smith

3. New appointments and elections consequent upon the new Synodical Quinquennium resulted in a number of changes to the membership of the Commission. The Commission wishes to place on record its gratitude to Jonathan Alderton-Ford, Robert Hammond and Lucinda Herklots for their considerable contribution to its work over the past few years. We are grateful to have the services of Anthony Archer, Maureen Cole, Malcolm Halliday and Rob Munro in their stead.

Duties and Powers of the Commission

4. The Commission's duties and powers, laid down by the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007, are summarized in paras 7-13 of its 2008 Annual Report (GS Misc 920), which is available, with other information about the Commission and its work, in the Commission's area of the Church of England web site: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/dioceses-commission.aspx>

5. 2016 has been a quieter year for the Commission with no consideration of proposals for Reorganisation Schemes like that which led to the creation of the new Diocese of Leeds in 2014. The Commission nevertheless continued to exercise its statutory role in respect of the filling of suffragan sees; and it engaged in a range of discussions touching on its overall responsibilities for episcopal oversight.

Suffragan Sees

6. The Commission had received legal advice to the effect that the post of Stipendiary Assistant Bishop was not an ecclesiastical office and so would not be covered by Common Tenure applicable to other clergy posts. It was further advised that such a bishop would be an employee for the purposes of Part 5 of the Equality Act, and so any woman appointed to such a post, who would be expected in accordance with the arrangements made under the *House of Bishops' Declaration* to refrain from carrying out certain aspects of ministry in parishes which had passed a resolution under the *Declaration*, would be at risk of a claim for unlawful sex discrimination. In the light of this advice, the Commission reached the view that no more bishops should be appointed to such a post. Its view was also strengthened by the fact that any such post holder would have had to have been consecrated already, as it is legally only possible to consecrate someone to an existing see. This significantly limits the pool of people who could fill such positions and makes the task of matching those available to the needs of the post far more challenging than need be the case. The Commission therefore believes that, if there is a mission case for a full-time assistant bishop, the appropriate mechanism in future is to follow the process for appointing a suffragan bishop laid down under the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007.
7. At the beginning of the year there were two remaining full-time stipendiary bishops in post, in the Dioceses of Newcastle and Leicester. Given that the Rt Revd Frank White, assistant bishop in the Diocese of Newcastle, had signalled that he would retire on 30 September 2016, the Commission initiated discussions with the Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Revd Christine Hardman, about future episcopal oversight. The diocese decided that it wished to fill the **See of Berwick** which had been left unfilled since 1572 for a reconfigured episcopal role designed to enhance its strategic capacity for church growth, in line with the Renewal and Reform programme. The Archbishop of York and the Commission accordingly gave their approval for the revival of the See, and Canon Mark Tanner was consecrated as Bishop of Berwick on 18 October.
8. As the other remaining full time stipendiary bishop, the Rt Revd Christopher Boyle, in **the Diocese of Leicester** is approaching retirement, the Bishop of Leicester, the Rt Revd Martyn Snow, has been in discussion with the Commission about future oversight arrangements. In September Bishop Martyn presented a submission to the Commission to create a new suffragan see. This was also for a substantially reconfigured episcopal role, designed to boost the diocese's capacity to relate to BAME Christians, and other faith communities. The Commission was happy to support this proposal (as was the Archbishop of Canterbury), and the matter is due to be brought to the General Synod in February 2017, as its consent is also required for the *creation* of a suffragan see.
9. The Commission continues to take care that any proposal to fill suffragan sees should be rooted in the diocese's mission strategy, cohere with the roles of others in the diocesan senior leadership team, and include roles that are inherently episcopal. To this end it published revised guidance on its web pages to assist those in dioceses in considering their oversight needs.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/dioceses-commission/suffragan-sees.aspx>

10. In exercising its responsibilities under section 17 of the Dioceses and Pastoral Mission Measure 2007, the Commission also considered, and agreed to, submissions for the filling of the following sees during the year:

- Bolton (in the Diocese of Manchester)
- Tewkesbury (in the Diocese of Gloucester)
- Woolwich (in the Diocese of Southwark)

Visits to dioceses and bishops' regional groups

11. As part of its ongoing dialogue with bishops and dioceses, representatives of the Commission made the following visits during the year:

- The North Western Regional Bishops' Meeting (February);
- The Bishop of Leicester (June);
- The Diocese of Leeds Senior Staff (June);
- The Assistant Bishop of Newcastle (March);
- The Dioceses of Ely and Peterborough (October);
- The Leicester Diocesan Synod (November).

Renewal and Reform

12. The Commission is conscious that it has as its disposal mechanisms that may assist the outworking of the Renewal and Reform programme, with which dioceses are engaged with the Centre (as documented elsewhere). 8 members of the Commission met with Mike Eastwood, Director of Renewal and Reform, in October to discuss its role in relation to that programme. The Commission found that discussion very helpful and intends continuing to engage with the R&R programme in the future.

[On behalf of the Commission]

MICHAEL CLARKE
Chair

30 December 2016