

GENERAL SYNOD

DIOCESES COMMISSION

Review of Joint Diocesan Working Arrangements- 2013

1. The Dioceses Commission has a duty, when carrying out its duty to keep under review the provincial and diocesan structure of the Church of England, to ‘disseminate, to the extent that the Commission thinks necessary and in whatever form the Commission thinks fit, guidance and information about good practice to persons and bodies involved in diocesan administration’.
2. In order to facilitate this, the Commission took the decision that, as a follow-up to the previous exercise¹ on joint diocesan working in 2009-10, a paper was required, in essence, to ascertain ‘the lie of the land’ three years on.
3. In order to revisit the various issues which arise in diocesan joint working, and to look at the different approaches and views held around the country, it was deemed to be appropriate to conduct a survey of all dioceses and to look at a particular case study.
4. The survey questions were divided into three sections to allow for answers from dioceses who:
 - i) had a joint diocesan working arrangement in place;
 - ii) did not have a joint diocesan working arrangement in place; and
 - iii) previously had a joint diocesan working arrangement in place.
5. All Diocesan Secretaries were sent a copy of the survey². The survey was designed to be straightforward to answer and worded to help ascertain how widespread joint diocesan work is, has been and will be. The survey also asked for recommendations and comments that could be factored into any guidance that the Commission may issue.
6. The 2009 review was designed to look at issues and lessons learned for joint diocesan working. The questions asked of each joint working group ‘were selected to elicit the key factors that brought the exercises into being and sustained them and to highlight any particular issues that arose’.³ The present review was in effect more far reaching as it asked all dioceses for a response and looked at current, future and past joint working arrangements and the benefits and challenges which have arisen. The Commission received submissions from over 50% of diocesan secretaries which, given a fairly limited deadline, was a good and helpful response

¹ The exercise was carried out in 2009 and the report ‘Diocesan Joint Working: Issues and Lessons Learned’ was issued in March 2010.

² The Diocesan Secretaries of Guildford, Portsmouth and Winchester were sent the survey for information only (see section 7). The Diocesan Secretaries of the dioceses covered by the West Yorkshire Review, Bradford, Ripon & Leeds and Wakefield were given the option to respond.

³ ‘Diocesan Joint Working – Issues and Lessons Learned’ 25 March 2010

rate. The Commission is very grateful to all of those who responded and for the time and effort that went in collating the information.

7. The Commission received replies from **25** Dioceses⁴. Of these **19** had some type of joint diocesan working arrangement in place and **5** had plans for future arrangements either formal or informal. The remaining diocese⁵ agreed with joint diocesan working arrangements in principle, ‘...we should all be looking for efficiencies and synergies that save money and enable all to concentrate on the priority of mission on the ground’, but felt that they ‘have to be pragmatic and do this as well as possible’. Only **1** of the dioceses⁶ who responded felt that there would be a reduction in their existing joint working arrangements.
8. The common thread throughout the survey was that although joint working arrangements were seen as a good idea in principle it depended on the circumstances that the individual dioceses found themselves in. There was a call for the Commission to indicate ‘a country wide plan to rationalise dioceses, thus encouraging specific groups to work towards merger’⁷ but this was a viewpoint which was suggested by only one other diocese.
9. The summary of the survey looks at the key points highlighted by the submissions.

How long had the Joint Diocesan Working Arrangements been in place for?

10. Several arrangements had been in place since the early 2000s but a number had come into being since the 2009/2010 review. As mentioned in the introduction, there are several planned to be in place by the end of the current decade.

Are there Financial Savings to be had through joint diocesan working?

11. Although there were financial savings garnered by joint diocesan working this did not appear to be the driving force of the arrangements in place. Rather there was the desire to achieve better value for money and enable the recruitment of a higher calibre of staff.
12. The ability to increase buying power was recognised as being important as well as achieving economies of scale. One submission stated that the benefits were very rarely cost reduction.

Is it just a case of having joint members of staff?

13. No. Some dioceses share their members of staff to provide cover for neighbouring dioceses. This was something particularly useful for Safeguarding whereby such

⁴ Bath & Wells, Birmingham, Blackburn, Bristol, Chelmsford, Chester, Coventry, Derby, Durham, Exeter, Guildford, Hereford, Leicester, Lichfield, Lincoln, Liverpool, Newcastle, Norwich, Oxford, Portsmouth, Ripon & Leeds, St Albans, Southwark, Winchester and York.

⁵ Lichfield

⁶ Leicester. Coventry, with whom the arrangements were with, described them as having evolved.

⁷ Birmingham submission

cover arrangements enabled the diocesan bishops in one area to have 24 hour, 7 days a week access to a Safeguarding Officer.

14. The idea of supporting or providing a particular service to other dioceses was also prevalent as was having a shared focus.

Is there a perfect model of joint diocesan working?

15. No. The arrangements are there to provide a particular need which had been identified by diocesan secretaries/ joint working groups. Arrangements have evolved over the time that they have been in place. As issues have arisen a solution to them has been put in place.
16. In some cases the decision has been made to scale back on joint working in some areas of work but to develop it in others. Two diocesan offices realised ‘that process based activities (e.g. management of houses and processing clergy stipends) are better suited to joint working than areas/ posts which need to be embedded in the core operating team of a Diocese (e.g. finance and the servicing of Diocesan Advisory Committees (DACs))’⁸.

What areas are covered by joint working?

17. The areas covered by joint working are varied and include financial matters, clergy development training, education and church schools, houses and property management, HR, IT and safeguarding.

What are the challenges?

18. There were several challenges expressed in the submissions but they were ones that had been worked through and mostly resolved. The issue of geography was cited given the distances required to be travelled by some members of staff. Clearly this is one challenge which would be difficult to resolve and careful thought would be required if a large amount of travel was to be expected for a member of staff working under a joint working arrangement.
19. The need to reconcile different priorities and cultures in participating dioceses was commented on in several submissions, and issues of control and the need to develop trust between the parties involved was stressed. It was also seen as important that joint workers felt fully part of the dioceses that they are working in and that when there are changes proposed it is recognised that they could perceive this as a threat to their jobs.
20. There was a realisation that joint working could create a fear of takeover or a loss of identity and this was something that needed to be tackled, probably as early as possible.

⁸ Coventry Submission

What benefits are there?

21. As stated earlier the benefits are rarely seen as financial: it is more a case of pooling resources to be able to afford experienced and qualified staff for key appointments. The arrangements also allowed for complementary skills and staff to be shared and for an enhanced level of flexible working.
22. There was the opportunity to learn from the experience of the other diocese(s) as well as the chance of mutual learning and focusing on a common vision.

What is the future of joint working?

23. The Commission wishes to promote joint diocesan working and hopes the brief summary provided will give diocesan secretaries and joint working groups some encouragement to develop or instigate more arrangements.
24. Our findings certainly indicate that the benefits clearly outweigh the challenges, Joint diocesan working should be viewed as a positive step in which dioceses work together on a regular basis sharing resources and expertise.

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(on behalf of the Commission)
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