

GENERAL SYNOD

Simplification Group

Report by the Archbishops' Council

Summary

1. The Archbishops' Council established the Simplification Group as one of a series of steps, agreed with the House of Bishops, in response to Archbishop Rowan Williams's Presidential Address at the November 2010 inaugural group of sessions. The Group's remit, as part of the 'Going for Growth' agenda, was 'to produce an initial assessment within twelve months of credible options (including as necessary ones that would require legislation) for **reducing the time spent by clergy and church members on the management of structures and processes**' (GS Misc 995).
2. The Simplification Group was established in the late summer of 2011. Its membership consisted of:
 - Mary Chapman (Chair)
 - Andrew Britton, Chair of the Council's Finance Committee
 - The Revd Canon Robert Cotton
 - The Rt Revd Trevor Willmott, Bishop of Dover

Andrew Roberts, Peterborough Diocesan Secretary was the Group's Assessor.
3. From the outset the Group adopted a 'parish up' approach, taking its starting point in the pressures on parishes and their clergy and inviting them to identify areas of change that would make life more straightforward and release energy for mission.
4. An open consultation process announced in the Church press and on the Church of England website in October 2011 setting out the Group's remit and inviting suggestions for review and change produced responses from parish clergy, PCC and other church members, archdeacons and diocesan secretaries, many of whom were grateful that such an exercise was underway. It was widely seen as long overdue. Many parish clergy were concerned at the extent of the administrative burden that they bear and its impact on their ability to channel their energies into mission.
5. The responses contained a large number of thoughtful suggestions. They were broadly consistent in identifying the following areas where parishes and their clergy would benefit from action from the centre to promote change:
 - a simplification of the Church Representation Rules
 - a review of the faculty jurisdiction
 - some streamlining of the processes around pastoral reorganisation
 - the development of more online resources and advice for parishes
6. The Group reported on these areas to the Council last autumn. The Council accepted its recommendations in full. It also agreed that simplification should be at the forefront of its thinking in the exercise of its responsibilities for bringing together policy and resources for supporting the work of dioceses and parishes.
7. The main findings of the Simplification Group's reports to the Council are summarised in paragraphs 17 to 36 below. Against that background, the Council has set work in train as follows:

Church Representation Rules (paragraphs 17-22)

8. The intention is that a detailed set of proposed amendments to the Rules will be drafted and brought to the Synod for approval in November 2013 or February 2014.
9. Synod members who have comments to make on the proposals that follow should send them to nicholas.hills@churchofengland.org.uk by 6 September 2013. The draft amending rules will also be amendable when they come to be considered by the Synod.
10. Synod will note that these are not the only proposals for amendment of the Church Representation Rules. The Business Committee has also put forward proposals for change (see **GS 1901** and **GS 1906**) in relation to synodical elections (including the electorate of the House of Laity of the General Synod).
11. Once the various amendments to the Rules have been made over the coming groups of sessions, the intention is to produce a consolidated version of the entire set of Rules (which have been amended piecemeal over time).
12. The Council has already agreed that the present Rules should, for the first time, be available free of charge online and they can now be accessed at www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/churchlawlegis/church-representation-rules.aspx.

Faculty jurisdiction (paragraphs 23-28)

13. In the case of the faculty jurisdiction, the Simplification Group commissioned a specialist group chaired by the Chair of the Church Buildings Council to consider ways in which the system might be streamlined. The Council accepted this group's proposals in November last year. Those changes requiring amendments to the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules are included in the wider revision of the Rules that are before the Synod as **GS 1887**. Some changes will require an Amending Measure. The intention is to bring that for First Consideration in November.

Pastoral reorganisation (paragraphs 29-33)

14. The Simplification Group again sought advice from people with expertise in this area to consider whether there was scope for further streamlining the recent legislation. Soundings in the dioceses suggest that there may well be, but the Council concluded that the Church Commissioners needed to consider possibilities further before any fresh legislative change should be proposed.

Parish Resources (paragraphs 34-36)

15. The Parish Resources website has been substantially updated to include a much wider range of online resources for parishes (www.pariahresources.org.uk).

Other

16. The Council identified early on a need to amend the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986 to simplify one area of practice. Since the particular proposal seemed uncontroversial, it has been included in the draft Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure, which returns to the Synod for its Revision Stage this July (see **GS 1866A**).

The Proposals

The Church Representation Rules

17. The Church Representation Rules ('the CRRs') are contained in Schedule 3 to the Synodical Government Measure 1969. They set out much of the detailed framework governing the synodical government of the Church, including rules for the representation of the laity at each level of the Church's governance structures. PCCs are the most local level of church government and, in relation to them, the CRRs cover such areas as the preparation of the church electoral roll, the conduct of the annual parochial church meeting ('APCM') and PCC meetings.

18. The CRRs have been amended on numerous occasions since they were first approved and some textual corruptions have crept in over the course of time. Some thought has already been given by the Legal Office to addressing this in the course of this quinquennium, partly through a process of consolidation – which could itself make ‘corrections and minor improvements’ – including by putting the CRRs into simpler and more direct language. This is, therefore, one area where non-controversial improvement could be undertaken as soon as resources permit.
19. More widely, the consultation exercise revealed concern about the level of prescription contained in the CRRs, respondents highlighting a number of areas where they believed that some relaxation of the CRRs might help save parishes time and duplication of effort. Particular concern was expressed about the burden that the present requirements impose in rural multi-parish benefices.
20. The Simplification Group identified a number of areas where some simplification could be undertaken, especially in relation to Appendix II (which sets out a large number of general provisions relating to PCCs). It tested these areas with a further round of consultation and the response to the package of proposals was very supportive and encouraging.
21. The general principle adopted by the Group and endorsed by the Council is that PCCs should have the same general responsibility to regulate their own affairs as other charitable bodies and that the national framework of rules should not be more prescriptive than is necessary. To the extent, therefore, that the existing provisions seek to turn good practice into a legal requirement, the Council agreed that they should be amended. The changes that the Council has agreed should come before the Synod for consideration include:
 - (i) repeal Rule 3 concerning the need for one parish to notify another when someone’s name is to be added to the roll of the first and removed from the roll of the latter;
 - (ii) remove the requirement in paragraph 2 of Appendix II for each PCC to hold a minimum of four meetings a year (in addition to the APCM) and replace it with a minimum requirement of one PCC meeting a year (in addition to the APCM);
 - (iii) remove the requirement in paragraph 4(a) of Appendix II for notice of every PCC meeting to be posted at or near the principal door of a church at least ten clear days before the meeting is to take place;
 - (iv) remove the prohibition in paragraph 6 of Appendix II on the transaction of any business not on the agenda unless at least one-third of the members are present and three-quarters of the members present and voting agree;
 - (v) remove the requirement in paragraph 7 of Appendix II for business to be transacted in the order specified on the agenda unless the PCC resolve otherwise;
 - (vi) remove the requirement at paragraph 14(a) for a standing committee to consist of not fewer than five persons;
 - (vii) remove the requirement at paragraph 15 of Appendix II for the minister to be an *ex officio* member of all committees established by the PCC and instead substitute a provision that he or she will be entitled to be a member of all such committees but does not have to be;
 - (viii) insert a provision in Appendix II for a PCC to be able to regulate its own proceedings, subject to any specific requirements of the CRRs or any other enactment; and
 - (ix) insert an express power in Appendix II to enable PCCs to delegate functions to committees of the PCC.
22. None of these amendments is designed to produce a revolution in the way that PCCs conduct their business under the CRRs. But they should mean that clergy and PCC secretaries will have to consult the rule book less often. They will create more local flexibility and are in line

with modern governance principles, which give charities a good deal of scope to regulate their affairs in the light of their own circumstances.

Faculty jurisdiction

23. The last major overhaul of the faculty jurisdiction was carried out in the 1980s. A large number of responses to the Simplification Group's consultation highlighted its operation as an area that was ripe for streamlining. While the faculty system remains important, it was felt to be overly bureaucratic, resource intensive and often unfathomable to those who had to apply for a faculty. The key need was to make it more user friendly.
24. In broad terms, the faculty jurisdiction applies to all consecrated buildings and land, including all parish churches (whether or not listed) and churchyards and some licensed chapels as well as to the ornaments and furnishings of those buildings and to any objects in or on that land.
25. The faculty system is a reflection of the Church's belief that decisions about what happens in and to church buildings is not simply a matter for local, congregational decision. It is important both for safeguarding the Church's historic buildings and for maintaining the confidence that the Government places in the Church of England in allowing it to operate its own internal procedures rather than being subject to the secular consent procedure for listed buildings.
26. Anne Sloman, Chair of the Church Buildings Council and a former member of the Archbishops' Council was invited to lead work to determine what might be done to modernise and streamline the faculty jurisdiction to make the process easier for those in the parishes.
27. Based on extensive consultation with parishes and evidence from a wide range of interested parties, the recommendations produced by the the group Anne drew together and endorsed by the Council represent a significant and worthwhile package of changes. Many of them can be implemented straightaway by a combination of administrative action and good practice. Others will require a Rule change (the first of these will be before the Synod in July) and some will require amending legislation (which should be before the Synod in November).
28. More detailed material on the Rule changes and the subsequent draft Measure will be found in the Explanatory Memoranda for those instruments when they are brought before the Synod. In summary, the overall package of changes includes:
 - (i) the establishment of an agreed national list of minor works;
 - (ii) the establishment of an agreed national list of routine works which will require advice from the DAC and the approval of the Archdeacon, but do not need to go through the full faculty procedure;
 - (iii) a more streamlined application process from early advice stage through to the formal Petition with a more disciplined time frame for routine applications;
 - (iv) a move to an online form with a printed paper version available for those who are unable to access a computer;
 - (v) expanding the use of Statements of Significance accompanied by a Basic Information Form which will be stored electronically to build up a data base in each diocese, thus eliminating the need for repetition in future applications; and
 - (vi) a much shorter and more streamlined Petition Form.

Pastoral reorganisation

29. A number of respondents to the consultation identified the process for pastoral reorganisation as one which was in need of improvement, characterising it as convoluted and protracted. Again, in some cases, it was perceived to be an obstacle to mission rather than, as intended, an aid.

30. The Simplification Group therefore invited staff of the Pastoral and Closed Churches Division of the Church Commissioners, who administer the system and provide guidance on it, to consider whether any streamlining might be possible. The Pastoral and Closed Churches Division has held two seminars (in London and York) attended by over one hundred diocesan representatives (including parish clergy, archdeacons and diocesan secretaries), which have confirmed that many in the dioceses believe that there is a need for change in this area. In particular, there was consensus that the requirements could be simplified by removing one partly duplicated stage of the consultation process. That would involve amendment of the Code of Recommended Practice to which Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committees are required to have regard under the Measure.
31. The concern is that in addition to an initial informal round of consultation, there are two rounds of consultation inviting written views, the first on the draft proposals and the second on the draft scheme, which in reality are often essentially the same proposal, expressed in much the same words and contained in substantially the same documentation. The Commissioners propose to revise the Code of Recommended Practice to provide for a two-stage consultation which would include an initial ‘issues’ consultation (similar to the current informal consultation stage) and then consultation on the Draft Scheme itself.
32. Another area for possible further work which has been highlighted by the seminars and the Pastoral and Closed Churches Division is in relation to proposals which reorganise deaneries or archdeaconries as opposed to parishes – which can involve a very large number of statutory interested parties.
33. The Council has invited the Church Commissioners to test these proposals with representatives of the Diocesan Secretaries Liaison Group and then to revise and publish the guidance as necessary.

Online parish resources

34. A significant number of respondents felt that they had constantly to reinvent the wheel in many areas relating to parish administration and would like more support and be able to draw on the experience of others. Respondents identified a need for an up-to-date, easily searchable central resource to help them manage and administer their parishes.
35. Many diocesan offices already produce guidance material and standard templates (many of which are excellent) and a large amount of documentation is available on the national website, but the Simplification Group highlighted the scope for drawing the information together into a single access site.
36. A great deal of work has now been done, with further areas to be added in time. The new Parishes Resources website is available at www.parishresources.org.uk.

Conclusion

37. The Archbishops’ Council is grateful to the work undertaken by the Simplification Group and for the work undertaken by Anne Sloman and staff of the Church Commissioners. It hopes that the package of proposals outlined here and being taken forward in various ways will help to ease and simplify the administrative burden on parishes.

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