

**GENERAL SYNOD****Covid-19 Response****Summary**

1. This paper provides General Synod members with a snapshot of the work that has been undertaken by the national Church in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The work has been complex and wide ranging, but has been vital in supporting our church communities, parishes, dioceses and cathedrals as they seek to continue the Church's mission in these difficult circumstances.
2. I am hugely grateful to the NCI staff and our diocesan and cathedral colleagues for the immense work they have done, and continue to do, during this time.
3. At the time the General Synod meets informally on 11 July, we celebrate with joy that some churches and cathedrals will have begun to open their buildings for worship once more, subject to being able safely to do so. We will of course continue to provide guidance and support as we step into this next phase.
4. This paper reports on two main areas:
  - The Church in action
  - How the NCIs have been supporting the Church's mission

**The Church in action**

5. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented extraordinary challenges to the nation and to churches up and down the country. These are difficult and uncertain times, the full outcome of which we will not know for several months if not years to come. However, whilst our church buildings had to be closed for a period, in accordance with the law, the Church has remained very much active. We have seen churches across the nation supporting and blessing their local communities, and providing worship and fellowship in new ways using online platforms, often reaching out to those who have previously had little interaction with Church. This has been an inspiration.

**The Church in action in community**

6. Media coverage (both national and local) has highlighted how Churches and dioceses have been responding to local needs. The focus has been on Church being open and serving the community. This has included food banks, caring for the elderly, vulnerable and homeless, as well as supporting good mental health.
7. Some examples include:
  - Resources were developed by Church of England education leaders and teachers to help schools working with bereaved children and young people, as they prepared to re-open, recognizing that many may be returning grieving and traumatized.
  - the DailyHOPE line offered music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services from the Church of England at the end of a telephone line. DAILY HOPE line has so far registered over 150,000 users.

- In the diocese of Bath and Wells, 90 lay and clergy chaplains set up a helpline for anyone anxious, bereaved or facing end-of-life issues.
- A helpline was set up for those who cannot leave home by St Andrews in Shropshire, a local church, that answered over 1000 calls.
- In Newham, East London, Ascension Church is now meeting an eight-fold rise in demand for food parcels in its area during the pandemic, now providing between 8,000 to 9,000 meals per week – and more than 50,000 since lockdown.
- St Michael and all Angels in Bishops Cleeve Gloucestershire invited parishioners to tune into its first online service (amid growing concern about the pandemic) and it has become a regular slot. Now three times as many people tune in - from just over 200 regulars to more than 600 people.
- Cathedrals were illuminated in turquoise during Mental Health Awareness Week to show support for mental wellbeing at a time of anxiety and loneliness for many.
- Diocese of Salisbury has developed local prayer spaces by setting aside outdoor space to visibly encourage those seeking a place to pray.

### **The Church in action online**

8. Thousands of churches are regularly streaming services and events online. More than 5,000 local services and events are now listed on AChurchNearYou.com, up by 2,000 from Holy Week and Easter 2020. There will be others taking place that have not yet been listed on the website. Since January 2020 there have been more than 30 million page views on the AChurchNearYou.com website (the overall digital target for 2020-22 page views is 40 million). More than 3,000 lay and ordained leaders have taken part in national training to upskill in live streaming, online giving and using social media effectively. The blogs accompanying the webinars have seen a 545% increase in views.
9. The AChurchNearYou.com Resource Hub has been extensively used by over 17,000 lay and ordained editors to access online giving resources such as customisable videos and graphics. In addition, a range of hymns, songs and choral pieces have been made available thanks to a national partnership with St Martin-in-the-Fields and the Royal School of Church Music, in collaboration with the Liturgical Commission of the Archbishops' Council and the NCI Digital Team. In just seven weeks there have been more than 50,000 downloads for churches to use as part of local services and events. Feedback has been overwhelming positively and this music will have been heard hundreds of thousands of times.

### **How the NCIs have been supporting the Church's mission**

#### **Governance**

10. The governance arrangements for the national Church's work on COVID-19 took a little while to become established, as the Church, like all other institutions, adjusted both to the demands of the crisis, and to the need to work remotely. The House of Bishops had a first discussion of the then emerging pandemic on 10 March 2020, in

the last week before working from home was generally encouraged. At that point, the House was considering issues such as communion in one kind, and hygiene within churches that remained open.

11. The NCIs put in place a structure of workstreams relating to the pandemic based around a Gold/Silver/Bronze approach borrowed from Government crisis management. The regular official-level COVID GOLD meetings began on 3 March, with a twice or thrice-weekly rhythm thereafter. Regular meetings of bishops were put in place before the start of the formal lockdown, beginning with meetings of diocesan bishops, and a meeting of the regional convenors of bishops' meetings, during the week of 23 March. During that week, it was recognised that a more formal structure of governance and decision-taking would be necessary during the pandemic, and regular meetings of the House of Bishops were instituted, starting on Friday 3 April. Since then, the House of Bishops has met at least twice a month, and sometimes weekly – whereas normally the House would meet only two or three times a year. From May, the Recovery Group – the group of regional convenors, chaired by the Bishop of London – began to meet to prepare materials on recovery for the House of Bishops and for the wider Church. A Coordinating Group, comprising members of the House of Bishops, the Archbishops' Council and the Church Commissioners' Board, meets to look at financial matters concerning the whole Church, and to coordinate the work of the various "Emerging Church" groups (see GSMisc1250).
12. At the beginning of the crisis the Archbishop of Canterbury led daily meetings with his senior leadership team along with myself, Bishop Stephen Cottrell, the Archbishop of York's Chief of Staff, the National Adviser for Medical Ethics and Health and Social Care Policy, and William Nye. These have since continued as twice-weekly meetings and there is a strong link to the NCIs Gold Group via William Nye and others.

## **Principles**

13. From the early days of the pandemic, the NCIs have implemented a 'whole Church approach' to guide its work, seeking to work in partnership with dioceses, cathedrals and other key stakeholders across the Church and affiliated organisations. At the same time, we have recognised the diversity of experience within the Church of England and the importance of diocesan, deanery and parish structures, and have sought to reflect this in our response.
14. All decisions and advice have been based on Government regulations and guidance interpreted in the light of the best available public health information and with theological reflection. We recognise that, at times, some of the decisions and guidance we issued have caused pain and distress for many in our Church communities, and several have spoken openly about this. The diocesan bishops in late March took the view that it was imperative to support actively the clear and unequivocal government instruction to 'Stay Home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives' enacting our call to love our neighbours. In doing so, they felt it prudent and right, that the Church of England should set an example as 'the Church for England' to advise parishes and clergy to close church buildings for all purposes other than hosting essential community services such as foodbanks. They asked clergy to show solidarity with their parishioners and the wider community and other faith groups by 'staying at home' other than to conduct essential pastoral ministry, thus

refraining from entering church buildings for individual prayer or streaming of services. Similarly, they advised against funerals taking place within church buildings because, at the time, there was a real danger of many parishes being unable to conduct them safely. The primary concern of the bishops and of the NCIs was, and continues to be, to maintain the safety of our clergy, lay members and the wider public whilst providing spiritual support. We have taken great care in listening to expert advice and have worked closely with relevant government departments throughout the first wave of the pandemic as we seek to play a positive role in society's struggle against one of the greatest threats it has faced in living memory.

15. The NCIs have sought to address and engage with all aspects of the Church life, and how to further its ministry and mission in these circumstances. This has been achieved through the provision of liturgical, theological, financial, and public health resources, whilst recognising the duty of care we have to our clergy and members and ensuring that support reaches across the whole of society, particularly the most vulnerable.
16. This has been an unprecedented time for the Church and society as a whole. The Church has had to make difficult decisions at pace and so has 'learnt by doing', establishing best practice and amending advice as the situation has developed, whilst always guided by the principles outlined above.

## **Public Health Guidance**

17. Our public health guidance has been informed by the work of the Revd Dr Brendan McCarthy, National Adviser; Medical Ethics and Health and Social Care Policy, and the Revd Prof Gina Radford, former Deputy Chief Medical Officer and now a priest in Devon. They have collaborated from the beginning of the pandemic in tracing its development, interpreting scientific and medical research on SARS-CoV-2 and the associated illness, COVID-19, and applying government guidance to Church of England contexts.
18. Throughout, they have been in constant communication with contacts in government departments, with Public Health England, the NHS, and various other charities and medical bodies. The guidance they have provided to the NCIs and to the House of Bishops has been based on these contacts and on collaboration with other experts both within the Church of England and beyond.
19. All guidance that has been issued from the NCIs has been done in collaboration with them. This includes extensive work addressing the recommendations surrounding closing church buildings and other aspects of 'lockdown', developing guidance for the staged re-opening of church buildings and the phased reintroduction of other activities, detailed guidance regarding funerals, community and social action, and guidance for the many forms of chaplaincy including the new Nightingale Hospitals and temporary morgues.
20. They have been an integral part of the team supporting me in my role of leading the Recovery Group of the House of Bishops, providing the group with up to date information, analysis and advice.
21. As the first wave of the pandemic in the UK grows to a close, attention is now turning to reviewing lessons to be learned from the past few months, to keeping abreast of new research and to looking at emerging challenges such as medium to

long-term mental health and wellbeing issues among chaplains, clergy, parishioners and members of the wider community.

## Communications and Resources

22. The Communications strategy of the NCIs has been focused on three areas: *Inform, Console and Encourage*. This continues to form the focus of all output during the COVID pandemic.
23. There has been extensive communication keeping our internal stakeholder audience informed including a weekly COVID-19 webinar (for diocesan and cathedral communicators) supplemented with detailed guidance via on/offline notes and a WhatsApp COVID group. In addition, the department has worked on proactive and reactive media messaging for both global, national and local publications.
24. Prayers specifically for the Coronavirus situation have been widely used and shared and a booklet from Church House Publishing was distributed free to Church Times subscribers at Easter, since when over 25,000 copies have been ordered to help parishes reach those unable to access digital services and content. These coronavirus liturgy and prayer resources have also been viewed online almost 222,000 times.
25. Audio of Prayer During the Day and Night Prayer provided by Church House Publishing has been very well received, with more than 85,000 listens, and all of this content has fed the Daily Hope line, launched by Lambeth Palace. Since this new free telephone service went live it has been widely publicised, reported in the media and its stories of positive impact shared. It has surpassed 150,000 calls and 1.7 million minutes. The Daily Hope line uses both weekly service audio content and Prayer During the Day and Night Prayer.
26. The national online weekly services have been very well received by both regular churchgoers and those exploring faith. Lay and ordained figures from across the traditions, as well as prominent figures such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, HRH The Duke of Cambridge and Pope Francis, have contributed to services, all conveying the Christian message of hope, at a time of national crisis. Over the last three months there have been 5.2 million views in total, with up to one in five people watching coming from among those who report normally going to church monthly or less, and an encouraging number of under 34s engaging regularly.
27. Church House Publishing and the Digital Team have created a number of resources in recent months: completing #LiveLent and repurposing #EasterPilgrim from 2019, which was written by the Bishop of Oxford. This content has been seen millions of times. The department supported Thy Kingdom Come (TKC) and content was seen 2.1m times on social media, 40% more people used CHP's apps for prayer and worship during this lockdown TKC compared to TKC 2019 and TKC for Daily Prayer booklet was CHP's top-selling title in May. During Mental Health Awareness Week the Church shared resources developed by Rev Prof Chris Cook. The content was seen 2 million times and the BBC used the same reflections as part of Daily Service.
28. There will be continued work across the department in the months ahead, collaborating closely with diocesan colleagues and others, on plans for key

moments such as All Saints and All Souls, Remembrance, Advent and Christmas and Lent 2021.

### **Recovery Group (part of the 'Emerging Church of England' work)**

29. I chair the Recovery Group and it is composed of the eight Convenors of the Regional Groups of Bishops. In addition, it is supported by Bishop James Newcome, Very Revd David Hoyle (representing cathedrals), and a number of NCIs' staff from various teams.
30. Its aim is to look at options to help the Church of England, especially dioceses and cathedrals, as this crisis unwinds. In particular to consider and present to the Archbishops and Bishops and appropriate bodies how we might 'unlock' our organisation in response to the restrictions across the country being lifted and what steps we might want to take not just to go back as it were to 'normal' but to learn lessons from the crisis and all that has happened.
31. The Recovery Group's workstreams are:
- **Responding to Government advice on church buildings and services** – providing and updating guidance for churches based on the latest information.
  - **Building up our worshipping communities** – supporting churches in reaching out to existing and new worshippers through digital means and as we open the doors of our buildings for individual prayer and public worship.
  - **The wellbeing of church and communities** – support for those in ministry as we go through lockdown and the communities they serve.
  - **Re-imagining the Common Good** – focusing on the Church of England's response to social need including issues such as food poverty, housing insecurity, financial shock and domestic abuse.
  - **Marking our communities** – liturgical resources to support national and local services and memorials.
  - **Liturgical resources to support the recovery process** – liturgical resources to support a return to public worship including areas such as Holy Communion and Ordinations.
  - **Supporting health and social care – support locally and nationally for work with groups such** as hospital chaplains and more broadly with those working in health and social care.
32. The output from the Recovery Group is informed by Government guidance and works with the Government in several ways to support the development of that guidance. The Group also is in close collaboration with other bodies of the NCIs, notably the Liturgical Commission and the Faith and Order Commission.
33. The group has input into the government taskforce on places of worship organised by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Both Brendan McCarthy and I sit on this taskforce. We also have input into the regular meetings organised by the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) focussing on the opening of heritage buildings through Becky Clark as Director of Cathedrals and Church Buildings. Gina Radford and Brendan McCarthy also communicate regularly with Public Health England (PHE). We have also spoken through Malcolm Brown, Director of Mission and Public Affairs, to the Ministry of Justice on questions relating to allowing marriages again in churches.

34. We cannot control Government guidance and the timing of particular permissions being made, but the intention of the group is to inform Government about what the lifting of restrictions will look like for churches and cathedrals, highlight areas of concern, and clarify where there is confusion between legislation and guidance, as well as between differing guidance from different departments referring to places of worship. We have also sought to encourage the government to ease restrictions in a safe and timely way.
35. It is clearly important that the church thinks theologically about the situation we are facing and about how we should respond. Theological questions have been especially apparent with regard to liturgy and worship under the restrictions, including the celebration of Holy Communion. The Recovery Group encouraged the Faith and Order Commission to work with the Liturgical Commission to consider these matters, and they have jointly produced 'Some Guidance on the Celebration of Holy Communion' to assist churches in this area.

### ***Other key workstreams to support the National Church Response:***

#### **Prayer & Worship Resources**

36. In addition to producing prayer and worship resources that are available for all in print and online, we have produced resources specifically for church leaders. We have published detailed guidance (in collaboration with the Faith and Order Commission) for the celebration of Holy Communion (including via live-stream) and for 2020 ordinations, as well as for the practice of Spiritual Communion and the celebration of Holy Week and Easter.
37. Three packs of resources were commissioned by the Recovery Group, in readiness for the resumption of public worship: 'Re-entering Church Buildings'; 'Lament, Thanksgiving, and Restoration'; and 'Remembering and Memorials' (in collaboration with the Life Events team, and including material which will help communities to commemorate those who have died during the outbreak). There will also be new liturgical resources for the anniversary of the NHS on 5 July.
38. The Liturgical Commission and their staff continue to contribute to the practical guidance on the conduct of services before lockdown and for the future, and has developed forms of service and practical advice for funerals and committals during the outbreak.

#### **The Wellbeing of Church and Communities**

39. Early on, pressures on mental health and wellbeing were identified as a key area of concern with the onset of lockdown. Within the Church, a working group to discuss mental health needs and possible interventions in the short and medium terms was convened by the Bishop of Carlisle.
40. There have been concerns surrounding the wellbeing of clergy and lay ministers during this difficult time. Two surveys were commissioned and carried out amongst Archdeacons and Diocesan Secretaries, looking into clergy morale and wellbeing and seeking to identify their concerns. The survey highlighted that the main concerns raised included those surrounding mental health and isolation, particularly for those clergy who live alone, and diocesan and parish finances. However, the survey also highlighted the positive impact of technology in helping

clergy to stay in touch with their church communities and beyond. Moreover, contact and support from senior clergy and diocesan officers was highlighted as particularly appreciated and helpful for an overwhelming majority of clergy.

41. The Church of England's digital platforms have proved invaluable for sharing mental health and wellbeing resources for clergy and laity alike. These have been produced in collaboration with the working group by Gina Radford, Brendan McCarthy and the Revd Prof Chris Cook. Resources include 13 daily reflections on mental health, tips for dealing with isolation and loneliness, and support for UK Minority Ethnic mental health. The Sunday Service broadcast during mental health week was led by Gina Radford and included a message from HRH the Duke of Cambridge.

*Life Events: Weddings, funerals and bereavement support:*

42. Over 80,000 free printed resources plus downloads have been sent out enabling churches to contact anxious couples and families regarding postponed weddings and christenings and to support those who have had restricted funerals. This has included producing resources to help those unable to attend funerals and raising awareness of digital options such as *light-a-candle* online.
43. The Life Events department has hosted five webinars related to funerals and bereavement which have been attended by over 2,000 colleagues. The team has also increased the frequency of '*churchsupporthub news*', an e-newsletter with updates and practical help to 8,000 subscribers.
44. Regular updates for the public have been made on [www.yourchurchwedding.org](http://www.yourchurchwedding.org) and a social media video on bereavement support was specially produced to help churches offer support.
45. We are continuing to work with partners to engage with bereavement support and remembrance services at both individual and community level, utilising the ecumenical platform [www.lossandhope.org](http://www.lossandhope.org) to encourage parishes to seek training on bereavement support. We are also working with dioceses to address the issues that have emerged around declining funeral ministry, identifying systemic and practical responses that will be needed.

### **Social outreach and government policy engagement**

46. A Bronze group of those with regular working links to government has been meeting weekly to discuss our handling of relationships and asks, and to share insight into the developing political situation. This work feeds into the NCI's Gold Group via several NCI staff. The work of this group has shown the strong working relationships we now have with ministers and officials in No.10, Cabinet Office, DfE, MHCLG and DCMS in particular, and internally across NCI Teams.
47. Archbishop Justin has written letters to and had Zoom meetings with Cabinet ministers and the Leader of the Opposition. This has enabled us to pass on concerns and quietly to lobby government on a range of key issues, and also offer pastoral support to individuals facing enormous pressure whilst carrying huge responsibility.

48. Attention has also been paid to how we can best reimagine and shape our society which has been deeply affected by the health crisis and will continue to be impacted by the associated financial crisis. It seems likely that there will not be a binary “before” and “after” COVID-19 timeline, but rather a period of time where we have to learn how to live with the virus. This may require subsequent regional and perhaps even more localised lockdowns, and will continue to have a disproportionate impact on those in high-risk groups most vulnerable to the virus (including but not limited to, the elderly, those living with pre-existing health conditions, those living in poverty and members of UK Minority Ethnic communities). Lambeth Palace’s Public Affairs team has identified a number of areas of key concern for the coming year, including;

1. Economic justice – using our networks and platform to do what we can to ensure that the impacts of this crisis are not disproportionately felt by poorest;
2. Acknowledging the disproportionate impact on UK minority ethnic groups and supporting calls for action to be taken in response to this;
3. Understanding the disproportionate impact on care homes and what this tells us about how our society values the elderly and people living with disabilities;
4. Responding to threats to social cohesion emerging as a result of this crisis - engaging with diverse groups and leaders to do what we can to combat risk of harmful, divisive narratives developing (for example reports suggest that there may have been a rise in racist abuse of people of Asian heritage since March);
5. Climate change – this remains the biggest existential threat we face and we need to ensure that the economic rebuilding from this crisis is environmentally friendly.

49. There has also been a focus on ensuring that the impacts of COVID-19 on the wider Anglican Communion are properly recognised and sufficient support is offered. We have been supporting the UN Secretary General’s call for a global ceasefire in response to the virus, and Government has been lobbied about its response to the threat of famine.

50. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on UK Minority Ethnic Groups, and the Black Lives Matter protests which have emerged in response to the killing of George Floyd, have shone a light on the issues of racial inequality and racism both in this country and internationally. The Archbishop of Canterbury has commissioned a task force to address these issues. As part of this wider work, and in the shorter term to address the impacts felt amidst the COVID-19 crisis, we have taken a number of steps to improve our understanding – including hosting a roundtable with UK Minority Ethnic community leaders, to hear from them about their communities’ experiences during the crisis, and running a race education session with Lambeth Palace’s senior leadership team.

## **Supporting Health and Social Care**

51. Across all NHS Trusts, healthcare chaplaincy teams have risen to the challenges of Covid-19 with dedicated ministry to patients, families and especially staff. An initiative between the local Trust and the Diocese of St Albans used local clergy as the primary contact to put bereaved families in touch with appropriate support,

embracing all religious traditions and those of none. This model was shared with all dioceses.

52. We have offered advice and guidance on chaplaincy provision at Nightingale Hospitals and have worked with the Diocese of London to share the experience of redeploying chaplains from other sectors to emergency morgues. There has also been increased contact between chaplains and their dioceses which has been particularly appreciated by many chaplains.
53. At the request of a group of healthcare chaplains who expressed concern about the implications of “rationing” care, staff provided a theological reflection on “impossible choices”, which was shared widely among chaplains.
54. We are collaborating with the chaplaincy team at Great Ormond Street to run a webinar on the role of faith and non-faith provisions in the crisis, at which I will be a principal speaker. The Archbishop of Canterbury has also attended a webinar hosted by a major care home provider in order to gain insight into the emerging challenges in this sector.

## Education

55. *Growing Faith* is part of the Church of England’s ‘Renewal and Reform’ programme of work and promotes a partnership between the three communities of church, school and household to enable the discovery, exploration and growth for all in those communities. This has moved forward rapidly under the new banner of ‘Faith at Home’. This was catalysed by a strategic relationship with the Oak National Academy, which was launched on 20 April by the Secretary of State, with the first Assembly being led by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Oak has already been accessed by over 2 million users over 12 million times. The Church of England has become the delivery partner for the Oak for weekly collective worship, producing two ten minute films for Primary and Secondary audiences, co-released through Oak and the Church of England’s new Faith at Home webpages: <https://www.churchofengland.org/faith-action/faith-home> .This is underpinned by the synchronous production of two further ‘Faith at Home’ series for Church Leaders, and Parents/Families, which are also being filmed and published weekly, providing resources for dioceses to use effectively at local level.
56. ‘Faith at Home’ is made up of the following linked components:
  - **Weekly ‘Faith at Home’ episodes.** To date the video resources have been viewed over 880,000 times.
  - **Written resources for schools published each week on the themes of the week** – drawn from a national team of writers from our Secondary and Primary networks.
  - **Wide range of partner organisations** supporting ‘Faith at Home’, including alignment of their resources with the themes, provision of video content, exemplar materials.
  - **Peer Support Networks in 2 strands:** one for Chaplains (run in partnership with the Centre for Chaplaincy in Education) and the other for clergy/school leaders with 17 Dioceses already committed to running these for the Summer Term and beyond
  - **Key guidance resources and documentation.** The first focused on support for ‘Grief, Bereavement and Loss’ through the Never the Same resource for

school leaders, and equivalent resources for church leaders and parents.  
Further publications are planned on Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing.

57. The Education Office and diocesan education teams are working in partnership with government and local authorities to support schools and enable their wider opening. Balancing the risks to children and young people from the virus itself (which are very low) with the significant health, wellbeing and educational risks for children not being in school is important, particularly for vulnerable children and for those from disadvantaged families who have been unable to access online learning effectively and are likely to be falling behind in their education.

## **Legal**

58. We worked with Government to prepare a clause for insertion into the Government's Coronavirus Bill to enable this year's elections to the General Synod to be postponed. The Government was persuaded to accept an amendment from the Second Church Estates Commissioner to insert the clause. The Legal Office then prepared the necessary Order in Council extending the life of the Synod until July 2021 and made the necessary arrangements for its approval by Her Majesty in Council.
59. Following consultation with members of the General Synod, we have prepared a Bill that would enable the General Synod to meet and conduct business remotely. It is hoped that the Government will provide time for the Bill to be passed before the summer recess.
60. The Legal Office has issued guidance to assist bishops, diocesan secretaries and diocesan registrars, which has included extending the time for holding annual meetings, and the means by which parochial church councils, deanery synods and diocesan synods can hold meetings and conduct business remotely.

## **Diocesan engagement**

61. The COVID-19 crisis has had a significant impact on all of the dioceses, leading to particular concern about diocesan finances, and so it has been crucial for the NCIs and dioceses to maintain regular contact and work together at this time. The Strategic Development Unit has had comprehensive conversations with diocesan secretaries which have helped to ascertain the needs and concerns of each diocese and inform the NCIs' work to support them, particularly financially, as outlined below.
62. Engagement between the NCIs and the dioceses has been through various channels in addition to this; The Diocesan Secretaries Liaison Group, which meets regularly with NCI Chief Officers, has increased the frequency of its meetings in order to ensure good collaboration and flow of information. The Diocesan Secretaries Conference on 29 June will be attended by various senior NCI staff and will address topics such as finance and people planning, collaboration across the Church, and the Church beyond 2020. Oliver Home, Chair of the Diocesan Secretaries Liaison Group, sits on the NCI's Covid-19 'Gold Group' which meets bi-weekly, deputised by Richard Gough (London), and has been able to feed back emerging issues and experiences at diocesan and parish level.

## **Cathedral engagement**

63. Our cathedrals have inevitably been feeling the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, some from the beginning of the year when the overseas tourists stopped arriving and the visitor numbers (for the time of year) started to drop significantly. When the UK lockdown started all cathedrals, in line with Church of England guidance, closed their doors, cancelled events and shops and restaurants ceased trading. The only income that remains is the regular and online giving.
64. Some cathedrals reported to us that without any help there would be cashflow problems within two to three months. When the Triennium Funding Working Group met to discuss the NCI response to COVID19, there was widespread support for the approach that had been taken to support cathedrals and for the use of the Cathedrals Sustainability Fund (CSF) to provide further financial support interventions as may be deemed most appropriate. The CSF was originally conceived to provide tactical funding for projects intended to boost cathedral income.
65. In May the Bishops and Cathedrals (B&C) Committee met and committed to immediately make urgent financial support available to those cathedrals most in need (see Financial Impact section). The next stage for the B&C Committee is to review a number of applications for the funding of additional posts to help cathedrals recovery, to review which cathedrals may soon be needing further urgent financial support and also to specifically look at what help can be given to cathedral musicians, to help preserve the Anglican Choral Tradition in our cathedrals.
66. Engagement between the cathedrals and the NCIs has been through numerous channels; most notably each cathedral has had at least one individual video conference, but also officers have attended the College of Deans, a weekly CAFA call and AEC meetings too. There have also been three surveys/questionnaires for information on staffing and the financial implications of the current crisis. To keep cathedrals in the central conversations, the Gold Group has included Michael Minta, Head of Bishops and Cathedrals and the Very Revd David Hoyle and the Very Revd David Monteith, representing Cathedral Deans.

### **Financial (for further details see GS 2173)**

67. In March the Archbishops' Council and Church Commissioners announced a liquidity support package of over £75 million for dioceses and cathedrals. For dioceses this comprised forbearance of up to three months clergy stipends accounts payments and paying all Lowest Income Communities Funding and Transition Funding grants for the rest of 2020 in April rather than monthly as originally planned. These sums totalled up to £50m and £25m respectively. In addition, the Commissioners paid the remaining section 23 grants for 2020, usually paid monthly to the 34 cathedrals receiving such grants, in one lump sum in April, providing a £3m liquidity boost to cathedrals. An additional £1m was paid in section 21 grants which would usually be paid close to the year end.
68. In May the Council and Commissioners announced Stage 2 of financial support for dioceses: up to £35m in sustainability funding. The majority of the sustainability funding will be made available in grants to the dioceses in most need, having regard to the resources available to them. This funding will provide short-term financial assistance for dioceses whilst they develop or begin to implement diocesan transformation programmes.

69. The Commissioners have revised their plans for the use of the £10m available as cathedral sustainability funding in 2020-22 in the light of the pandemic. This has included support for those cathedrals with limited cash reserves to held with their salary bills (up to £2m) and tailored support for Cathedral Heritage crafts (up to £1m). The Commissioners' Bishoprics and Cathedrals Committee will consider additional grant schemes in the light of emerging needs and available finance.

+Sarah Londin  
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