



*Our mission is to support the Church of England's ministry,  
particularly in areas of need and opportunity*

## Local Church Reorganisation

# YOUR VIEWS COUNT

This leaflet explains how you can submit comments (also known as representations) for or against any published draft Scheme or Order and how these will be considered by the Church Commissioners.

### What counts as a representation?

1. Written comments (preferably by email) should be received by the Commissioners before the stated deadline, which will be a minimum of 28 days after the draft Scheme or Order is published. These should be sent to the email address set out in the notice or to the Church Commissioners at Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3AZ. Any comments received will be regarded as public correspondence and will be sent to other parties and published on the Commissioners' website if the matter needs to be considered by the Commissioners' Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee.
2. If you state that you are for or against the proposal, we will treat this as a formal representation; if not, we will still include your comment in our subsequent paperwork. A petition will be treated as a representation, but we will only communicate with the sender, if known, or the first signatory with an address.
3. Comments received after the deadline will not be considered unless the Commissioners' staff consider there are exceptional circumstances and points made which could help our Committee to decide on the case.
4. The Commissioners will need to decide whether or not the proposals should go forward in the light of the representations. If no objections are received, or any received are subsequently withdrawn, the proposals can proceed immediately. A representor may withdraw his or her representation at any stage of the process.

### What happens next?

5. When the consultation period ends, we will invite the Bishop's comments on any representations. A copy of the Bishop's response, or a diocesan response on his or her behalf, together with copies of all

representations or letters of comment, will be sent to everybody who has written to us. (If we receive a high number of representations, we may decide instead to make these available only online to limit costs and the environmental impact. Representors will be notified if this happens.)

6. Representors can then, if they wish, send further written comments (preferably by email) by a specified date in the light of the Bishop's or diocesan response on the points raised in their original representation.

### **How do the Commissioners consider the representations?**

7. The Commissioners' **Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee** decides:

- (a) if a diocesan reorganisation proposal should go ahead; and
- (b) if proposals for the future of a closed or closing church building should proceed.

This Committee is made up of ordained and lay people drawn from different parts of the Church of England and with a range of expertise.

8. The legislation enables the Commissioners to hold such consultations and interviews and make such inquiries that they think are necessary. They may, but are not obliged to, allow oral representations. A sub-committee of members has delegated authority to decide on the basis of the written representations and the Bishop's response whether a hearing should be held, or a case should be considered on the papers alone. Guidance for making such a decision is published on the Commissioners' website. One factor taken into account is whether representors have sought an opportunity to speak to the Committee.
9. We will inform representors whether an oral hearing will take place. The Committee will consider the representations in private unless an oral hearing is held. **Your representation will receive the fullest consideration whether or not an oral hearing is held, or whether you attend such a hearing.**

#### *The Committee Paper*

10. The Commissioners' staff will prepare a report to which copies of the representations and subsequent correspondence will be attached. This will highlight the issues raised and provide other information to help the Committee reach a decision. The paper will be published on the Commissioners' website.

### **When a Public Hearing is held**

11. Hearings are open to the public and are usually held in the Commissioners' offices at Church House, Great Smith Street, London

SW1P 3AZ (near Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament). However, during the current circumstances they may need to be held virtually via 'Zoom'. If a hearing is held, we will let you know the arrangements for attending (in person or virtually) and details will also appear on our website. If you let us know you are attending, you can download it from our website.

#### *What happens at a Public Hearing?*

12. The Committee conducts public hearings in accordance with the principles of natural justice. These principles include managing any conflicts of interest transparently, ensuring the public hearing is conducted fairly to all concerned and providing all parties with a reasoned decision once it is reached.
13. Objectors to and supporters of the proposals may be able to speak to the Committee. The objectors will speak first, followed by the supporters, and then any diocesan representatives, each group for a maximum of 10 minutes. Speakers should bear in mind that the Committee will have read all the circulated documents, so they do not need to repeat word for word the points made in writing.
14. Normally, up to three speakers can be heard within the 10-minute time limit for those objecting or supporting the proposals. These time limits may be varied or more speakers allowed, at the Chair's discretion, to ensure a case is properly understood and considered and a decision can be made fairly.
15. Objectors and supporters may be asked beforehand to nominate three spokespersons and inform the Commissioners' case officer of their choices. At the meeting, if speakers were not chosen in advance or there is any disagreement or concern, the Chair will decide who will speak. Speakers will be chosen so that their views reflect as wide a range of points as possible from the representations. Normally only people who made representations (including petition signatories) will be asked to speak.

#### *What issues can I raise at the hearing?*

16. You should speak about the points raised in your representation or in response to the diocesan comments on these or, if acting as a spokesperson, the comments of those on whose behalf you speak. The Chair may allow new information to be raised if it is relevant.
17. Committee members may ask you questions but representors or speakers will not be allowed to cross-examine other speakers. Committee members may also ask questions of others attending.

#### *What happens next?*

18. Following the hearing representors and interested parties will be sent, normally within 15 working days, a statement of the Committee's decision in writing and explanation of the subsequent process. This will also be published on the website.

*Can I be represented by someone else at the hearing?*

19. It is expected that you will represent yourself at the hearing but if a friend or associate accompanies you, they may sit with you while you speak, take notes and make quiet suggestions to you, but they will not be allowed to speak for you unless you suffer from a condition or a disability that makes speaking difficult. You should inform our case officer about this beforehand. Our building is fully accessible but please let us know if you have any special needs.

*Can the case be deferred to a meeting at a later date if I cannot attend?*

20. Once the hearing date has been decided, it will not normally be changed but everyone will be treated equally if they request a deferral. If a deferral is agreed, all representors and any others with a known interest in the matter will be informed.

*Can I record the proceedings at the Committee meeting?*

21. No. Video or audio recording of any part of a meeting is prohibited except by the Commissioners' staff.

*What happens if the case is considered on more than one occasion by the Committee?*

22. If a decision is deferred following a hearing, the subsequent meeting will normally be in private session and representors will not be able to attend or speak again to the Committee.

*Can the Commissioners contribute to the cost of travelling to London to attend the Committee?*

23. No. The Church Commissioners have no legal powers to contribute to travel or related costs for members of the public attending our Committee meetings. Hearings will usually start after 11.30am to enable travel when public transport is cheaper but during the current circumstances they may need to be held virtually via 'Zoom' in which event the meeting time may be slightly earlier

### **What about Church property matters?**

24. The procedures for certain contested Church property matters are similar to those for draft Schemes or Orders but will be explained by our case officer in correspondence.

*If you need further information or help, please get in touch. For direct contact details see our correspondence or use the address or switchboard number below.*

Pastoral and Closed Churches Department  
Church Commissioners  
Church House  
Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3AZ

Telephone (switchboard) 020 7898 1000

Website: <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/MPCPC>