

DIOCESES COMMISSION
ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2021

1. The Dioceses Commission is required to report annually to the General Synod.

Membership and Staff

2. The Commission consists of a Chair and Vice-Chair appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the latter from among the members of the Houses of Clergy and Laity of the General Synod; four members elected by the Synod; and four members appointed by the Appointments Committee.

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

Chair: Dame Caroline Spelman (appointed July 2021)

Vice-Chair: The Revd Fr Paul Benfield (Blackburn)

Elected Members: The Revd Canon Geoffrey Harbord (Sheffield)

The Revd Dr Robert Munro (Chester)

Mr Gavin Oldham (Oxford)

[One Vacancy]

Appointed Members: The Rt Revd Paul Williams, Bishop of Southwell & Nottingham

The Rt Revd Dr John Perumbalath, Bishop of Bradwell

Ms Ruth Martin (Southwark)

Mrs Jacqueline Stamper (Blackburn)

Secretary: Mr Jonathan Neil-Smith (until July 2021)

Mr Simon Stanley (from August 2021)

4. The Commission welcomed Dame Caroline Spelman as the new Chair and thanked Mr Jonathan Neil-Smith for his service to the Commission upon his retirement in July 2021.
5. The Commission would be interested in speaking to any member of General Synod who may wish to stand to be an elected member of the Commission to start work in May 2022. If any Synod Members are interested in learning more about the work of the Commission, please contact the Chair or the Secretary for a conversation.

Role of the Commission

6. Information about the Commission and its recent work can be found in the Commission's area of the Church of England web site:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/dioceses-commission>

As a summary, the Commission's main duties and responsibilities set out in the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007. Its principal duties and powers relate to:

- the provincial and diocesan structure of the Church of England,
- good practice in diocesan administration, and
- the creation and filling of suffragan sees.

The Commission's primary duty is *to keep under review the provincial and diocesan structure of the Church of England* and in particular:

- the size, boundaries, and the number of provinces.
- the size, boundaries and number of dioceses and their distribution between the provinces.
- the number and distribution of bishops and the arrangements for episcopal oversight.

Business Undertaken

7. The Commission is pleased to see that several consultations are underway to discern the future structure and shape of the Church of England and the episcopacy. These reviews will considerably assist the Commission in its work to develop schemes to update the boundaries and distribution of the dioceses in England.
8. The Commission continues to have regular discussions about the shape and boundaries of the dioceses. Following the appointment of Dame Caroline as Chair, a series of productive conversations have taken place with the bishops, which has identified a range of areas where work could be commenced.
9. The Commission has continued to consider the applications to fill Suffragan Sees and would like to thank the bishops and representatives who have taken the time to present their proposals. The papers have been of high quality and given considerable thought to the current needs of the Church at a regional and national level. They have greatly helped the Members with their deliberations.
10. At the end of 2019, the Commission initiated a facilitated review of its role and responsibilities. This item of business is still incomplete and has been on hold given other reviews have commenced, notably the Governance Review (led initially by the Bishop of Leeds and now the Bishop of Guildford) and the two Consultations commissioned by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York on the Future of Episcopal Ministry which is considering culture and structure.
11. The Commission met twice in 2021 to consider what observations it wished to make to the first consultation on the Future Culture of Episcopal Ministry. The Bishop of Ely and the Ven. Mark Steadman were invited to assist the Commission's discussions. The Commission intends to make similar observations when the second phase of the consultation on the future of the episcopacy commences later in the year.

Suffragan Sees

12. The Commission continues to carry out its responsibilities, notably its statutory role in respect of the filling of suffragan sees. It seeks to ensure that any proposal to fill suffragan sees should make sense in the current financial climate, 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. In exercising its responsibilities under section 17 of the Dioceses and Pastoral Mission Measure 2007,

the Commission considered, and agreed to, submissions for the filling of the following sees during the year:

- a. Loughborough – following the translation of the Rt Revd Guli Francis-Deqani to the See of Chelmsford, the Diocese of Leicester presented a submission to fill the suffragan See of Loughborough. Proposals were made that this post would continue to work with BAME communities in the region and help support the Resource Churches and Fresh Expressions in the dioceses. The Commission approved the reappointment of a Bishop of Loughborough.
- b. Willesden – following the announcement that the Rt Revd Pete Broadbent intended to retire, the Diocese of London presented a submission to fill the suffragan See of Willesden. Proposals were made to tie this post more closely to the Diocesan Vision 2030, and among other duties, there was a need for a lead bishop for discipleship. The Commission approved the reappointment of a Bishop of Willesden.
- c. Barking - following the announcement that the Rt Revd Peter Hill intended to retire, the Diocese of Chelmsford presented a submission to fill the suffragan See of Barking. Proposals were made to continue with the existing Area Bishop Scheme in the Chelmsford Dioceses and for the role and duties of the new bishop to remain largely unchanged. The Commission approved the reappointment of a Bishop of Barking.
- d. Penrith – following the departure of the Rt Revd Emma Ineson to the role of the Bishop to the Archbishops, the Diocese of Carlisle presented a submission to fill the suffragan See of Penrith. The Commission was conscious that it had only recently reviewed and approved the See and that the context had not changed greatly. The proposal to continue the distinctive work of Bishop Emma to develop links with young people, other churches and faith communities in the region was supported, and the Commission approved the reappointment of the Bishop of Penrith.
- e. Kirkstall – following the announcement that the Rt Revd Paul Slater intended to retire, the Diocese of Leeds presented a submission to fill the suffragan See of Kirkstall. Given the lack of young people attending parishes in Leeds, the vision for the role of the Bishop of Kirkstall to engage students and young people in the City of Leeds, the Commission approved the reappointment of the Bishop of Kirkstall.
- f. Croydon – following the announcement that the Rt Revd Jonathan Clark intended to retire the Dioceses of Southwark presented a submission to fill the suffragan See of Croydon. The continuation of the public advocacy on asylum, migration, social and racial justice was one in which the Commission saw a sense in developing. The Commission approved the reappointment of the Bishop of Croydon.
- g. Hull – following the announcement that the Rt Revd Alison Hill intended to retire, the Dioceses of York presented a submission to fill the suffragan See of

Hull. The Commission wished to support the proposal that the See focus on addressing the challenges faced by coastal communities, and the Commission approved the reappointment of the Bishop of Hull.

- h. Beverley – following the announcement that the Rt Revd Glyn Webster intended to retire, the Archbishop of York's representative presented a proposal that remains under consideration by the Commission. A decision is expected before the Dioceses Commission's next meeting on 10th March 2022.

Joint Diocesan Working

- 13. The Commission continues to be mindful of the financial pressures facing the Church. It continues to bring its members' skills and experience to bear in the ongoing discussion about the cost-effectiveness of diocesan administrative structures.
- 14. The Commission intends to continue to work closely with the Vision and Strategy team led by the Rt Revd Martin Seely, Bishop of St Edmundsbury, to consider how best to encourage greater joint working between dioceses. It should be noted that, between 2013 and the present, dioceses have created limited new formal joint working schemes, and many of the longstanding formal schemes have ended.
- 15. Following the appointment of the new Chair, and several fruitful conversations with the diocesan bishops and diocesan secretaries, the Commission has a clear idea of the challenges currently facing diocesan administration. The Commission has been invited to engage with several regional bishop's groups to discuss closer working together proposals.

Conclusion

- 16. The Commission is acutely aware of the considerable pressures bishops, dioceses and staff of the NCIs are under currently. To undertake any structural changes without sufficient local buy-in or administrative support within the Commission would not be a good use of its limited resources.
- 17. Bishops could help the work of the Commission significantly by sharing their diocesan reviews of episcopal ministry. This would enable the Commission to update its reference material and understand long term plans and intentions of the diocesan bishops.
- 18. Diocesan Secretaries could similarly help the Commission's work by ensuring that the Commission is updated with any plans for informal or informal working together schemes that may be developed with neighbouring dioceses. This would greatly assist the Commission as it seeks to shape a way forward.

On behalf of the Commission

Dame Caroline Spelman – Chair of the Dioceses Commission

10 Jan 2022