

## A discussion document on possible changes to how Synod conducts its business.

1. In the years that the General Synod has been in existence, there have been many changes to the way its business is conducted, but the core activities have broadly remained the same. Synod meets in full session two or three times a year, all business is transacted on the floor of synod and business requiring legislative change is dealt with in open session to which all members can attend.
2. Whilst this procedure has worked well, and broadly mirrors the Parliamentary process for dealing with legislative change, members during the last quinquennium may have noticed a decrease in attendance at debates where legislation is being considered along with fewer members attending some non legislative debates but where the subject matter may be considered somewhat niche.
3. A number of proposals have been made over the years to review how legislation is transacted and the Business Committee, along with the Archbishop of Canterbury, are interested in gathering members views on some of the proposed ideas, before any significant work takes place on developing them. To be clear, these are merely ideas for discussion at this point and will need considerable work before they take greater shape, but the Business Committee, which has not taken a view on these possibilities, wants to engage with Synod as it, and others, consider them.
4. The Business Committee are holding a Fringe Meeting on Monday 11 July at 6:45pm in Spring Lane Building 002 (SLB/002) and would welcome hearing your views and thoughts on these, and any other changes you may wish to discuss.

### **GRAND COMMITTEES FOR LEGISLATION.**

5. Some members of Synod are much better at legislative business, and in fact much more interested by it, than others. At the same time, we must bear in mind that legislative business is the law of the land, and is delegated from parliament, and thus we have a responsibility to take it seriously and deal with it a manner which is satisfactory to the Ecclesiastical Committee.
6. It has been suggested that a Grand Committee be created which handles some aspects of legislative business as dedicated sessions other than during groups of sessions of General Synod.
7. The Grand Committee could consist of at least two people from each diocese, one lay and one clergy, chosen by the diocese on the basis of their expression of interest and skills in legislative business.
8. They would meet for the necessary time each year, and the Revision and Committee stages of the legislative process would be handled by them, with amendments and Revision Committees working with the GC as they do currently with the General Synod. <sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
9. At the Revision Committee stage, the Grand Committee could have amendments

submitted by anyone in the General Synod, as is possible at the moment. <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

10. The Chair of the Grand Committee could rotate between the five senior members of the House of Bishops, that is to say the two Archbishops and the three others who are Ex Officio members of the House of Lords (Bishop of London, Winchester and Durham). <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
11. The voice of bishops would be represented by members of the Revision Committee, or nominations of suitable bishops from the membership of the House of Bishops which would retain right of amendment to settle the final form of legislation if the legislation in question is Article 7 business; but not otherwise. <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
12. The biggest change would be that the General Synod would consider the revised piece of Legislative Business, and could not amend it but must simply accept or reject it in total. This would mean one major debate on the principles, but would stop the salami- slicing of measures by the entire General Synod, rather than by the Grand Committee. It should be a deterrent to the Grand Committee as well that their work would be lost if they defeated the purpose and principle of the measure. Before legislative business went to the Grand Committee, it would have passed the General Synod in principal. <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
13. The creation of the Grand Committee could additionally release considerable time within the General Synod which could be used to lengthen the time allocated to our debates or increase the number of Diocesan Synod or Private Members Motions taken. Alternatively, given the additional cost which holding the Grand Committee would impose on dioceses, another response could be to reduce the length of the groups of sessions of the Synod itself.
14. Although loosely described as a ‘Grand Committee’, it would not be the same as a Grand Committee as understood in the Houses of Parliament, where any member of the relevant House can attend a Grand Committee should they choose.

### **Select Committees**

15. The most important change in parliamentary process over the last 20 years has been the growth in power of Select Committees. Could the accountability of leadership in the Church be improved by considering the introduction of Select Committees from within the General Synod, either through the Nominations or Appointments Committee (with an obligation to seek balance in terms of churchmanship, group, gender, age, ethnicity, and disability) or by election? <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub> Select Committees might meet once a year, and would have a longer period to discuss with those responsible for particular areas what their policy was and how it was being delivered. They could initiate and lead learning reviews where there had been particular problems or successes. <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
16. As with the Grand Committee, Select Committees would involve additional cost in terms of accommodation, staff, IT, member’s time and travel which would necessarily have to be found from within existing resources.
17. Clearly both of these possibilities would require significant consultation, work, time

and legislation to come into effect, although the Select Committee option is potentially simpler to deliver as it does not directly affect legislation.

18. The Business Committee would welcome General Synod member's thought an comments on these, and any other suggestions, at their Fringe meeting or by correspondence to the Clerk to Synod.

Canon Robert Hammond, Chair

On behalf of the Business Committee

June 2022