

## Guidance on submitting a proposal to the Dioceses Commission regarding the filling of a suffragan see

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### Introduction

1. This document provides guidance for the use of diocesan bishops who wish to submit a proposal to fill a suffragan see to the Dioceses Commission. There is no template to follow for written submissions, however the Commission has outlined the information it will find most helpful as it considers whether a see should be filled.
2. The Commission's and the diocesan bishop's powers are set out in the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007 and so a brief overview of the relevant sections of the Measure are included for reference.
3. Example submissions are available from the Secretary.

### The Dioceses Commission's role

4. The Dioceses Commission is the national, statutory body which considers and approves proposals to fill a suffragan see, among other functions. As well as the needs of the given diocese, the Commission also bears in mind the broader picture of episcopal ministry. A suffragan bishop's ministry is never purely diocesan as all bishops are members of the provincial and national college of bishops and have a key role in the mission of the Church of England nationally. The Commission has oversight of the distribution of episcopal ministry across the country as a whole and draws on its accumulated experience in its decision making.

### Overview of sections 12 and 17 of the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007

5. Section 12 is related to section 17 of the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure, 2007, which is available via the [Dioceses Commission webpages](#) and [Legislation.gov.uk](#).

*Section 17 Summary: Provisions with respect to filling of suffragan sees*

6. Section 17 requires that the filling of all vacant suffragan sees<sup>1</sup> should be justified. If the Commission considers that the proposal to fill the see requires further consideration it is empowered (with the agreement of the Archbishop of the Province) to require that the process for creating or reviving a see is followed.
7. It should be noted that sees held by area bishops in dioceses with Area Schemes under the Dioceses Measure 1978 are suffragan sees and the requirements apply to them
8. The procedure for filling a suffragan see is set out in section 17 and is summarised below:
  - When a suffragan see has become vacant or is shortly to become vacant, the first step is for the bishop to consider whether the see should be filled, taking into account his duty under s. 12 of the Measure to keep under review the provision of episcopal ministry and oversight in the diocese and to consult widely in doing so. (17.1)
  - If the bishop thinks that a proposal to fill the see should be considered, he/she consults the diocesan synod (or, if the matter is urgent and it is not practicable to consult the diocesan synod, the bishop's council). (17.2)
  - If the bishop then decides that the see should be filled, he/she notifies the Archbishop of the Province and the Dioceses Commission of the proposal and gives reasons for it. (17.2)
  - The Commission is required to notify the Archbishop and the bishop concerned within two months either that it agrees with the bishop's proposal or that it considers that it requires further consideration. (17.3)
  - If the former is the case, or if the Archbishop informs the bishop (within two months) that he does not agree with the Commission's view that it requires further consideration, the bishop may petition the Crown to appoint a new suffragan. (17.4)
  - However, if the Commission considers that the proposal needs further consideration and the Archbishop informs the bishop (within two months) that he agrees, the full procedure for creating suffragan sees under section 18 of the Measure will apply, and the proposal will need to be approved by the General Synod. (17.5)

*Section 12 Summary: Duty of the bishop to keep episcopal ministry under review*

9. Section 12 of the Measure requires that each bishop of a diocese keeps under review the provision of episcopal ministry and oversight in his or her diocese and will, in carrying out that duty, consult widely such persons and bodies as he or she thinks fit.
10. A purpose of this requirement is to ensure that consideration of the need for existing suffragan sees begins before the vacancy arises, in order to limit the delay in filling them which might otherwise result.
11. In the dioceses that have area schemes (e.g. Chelmsford, Leeds, Lichfield, London, Oxford, and Southwark) it may be appropriate to review from time to time the operation of the area scheme and the responsibilities that are delegated to area bishops under it, to see whether the provisions of the scheme still meet the needs of the diocese and its mission.

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<sup>1</sup> The see of Dover is excluded from the processes in this Measure as it is subject to the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC) process as if it were a diocesan see.

12. Where there is no suffragan, such a review may either point to a need for a suffragan or establish that any need for episcopal ministry to supplement that of the diocesan bishop is adequately met. This may be by sharing resources with bishops from neighbouring dioceses and/or the use of honorary assistant bishops. The situation may need to be reviewed from time to time, as both the national and diocesan workload of the diocesan bishop and the demand for specifically episcopal ministry within the diocese are likely to vary over time.
13. It is for each diocesan bishop to decide how he or she will comply with the requirement laid down in section 12 of the Measure. Subject to that, the Commission envisages that, as a minimum, it would involve some consultation beyond the circle of the diocesan bishop and his senior staff every few years about the adequacy of the provision for episcopal ministry and oversight in the diocese. This may form part of a wider periodic consideration of the mission of the diocese, with a view to long-term strategy. The ministerial development reviews of the diocese's bishops may also provide a helpful context in which the provision of episcopal ministry and oversight in the diocese can be kept under review.

#### Guidance on submitting a proposal for filling a see

14. Upon deciding that he or she would like to fill a suffragan see - having consulted as appropriate within the diocese - the bishop should notify the archbishop of the province and the Commission of his or her proposal and give the reasons for it. Submission to the Commission is in the form of a written proposal with a short presentation of the proposal at one of its meetings.
15. The Dioceses Commission usually meets four times per year and it is at these meetings that the Commission considers the proposals before it. The meeting dates for the forthcoming year can be found on the [Dioceses Commission pages](#) of the CofE website. The Commission would expect that an announcement that the see will soon be vacant - for whatever reason - would have been made public before the Commission considers a proposal to fill the see. Bishops are asked to notify the Secretary in good time that he or she would like to present a proposal to the Commission. The Secretary will then be able to offer any further guidance and discuss the bishop's attendance at a meeting. The deadline for the written submission is usually 2 weeks prior to the Commission's meeting.

#### Written submission

16. Written submission to the Commission should be in the form of a proposal document of up to 5 pages and a draft job description for the see is requested in addition to this. The bishop is welcome to include other documents he or she feels relevant to the submission as appendices, such as drafts of material that might be prepared for candidates, area scheme information, or instruments of delegation.
17. The Commission does not suggest a particular template is followed as it wants to allow bishops a degree of creativity and the ability to describe the need for the see and the work of the diocese in their own way. Bishops are encouraged to contact the Secretary for some examples of recent submissions that the Dioceses Commission has thought to be well crafted and might be helpful for others.
18. Dioceses and the need for and demands of episcopal ministry within them vary widely. The Commission is particularly keen to ensure that all suffragan bishops have clear responsibilities, whether geographical or portfolio. This is both for the efficacy of the suffragan bishop's ministry in

relation to the diocesan bishop and the wider diocese, but also for their well-being and fulfilment in their role. Members will therefore look to be assured of this in the proposal documents.

19. Dioceses without formal or informal area schemes are encouraged to outline clearly the areas of responsibility the suffragan bishop is expected to hold. An indication of how the relationship between the diocesan and any other suffragans is managed, and also how the geographical oversight across the diocese is managed, would be helpful.
20. The Commission suggests that the following information would be helpful for its consideration of the see:
  - An indication that the Diocesan Synod or Bishop's Council has been consulted on the filling of the see (per s17.2) and any issues raised in that forum.
  - A rationale for the post with an indication of why a bishop is needed to fulfil the post.
  - An indication of the diocesan, regional and national issues that the bishop has taken into account in deciding to fill the see.
  - It is especially important for the Commission to understand the medium to long term plans for the diocese. Therefore an indication of when the arrangements for an area scheme or senior team (as relevant) were last reviewed is requested, as well as an indication of the intentions for the diocese for the next 10-15 years. This relates to the diocesan bishop's duty under Section 12 to keep under review the provision of episcopal ministry and consult widely.
  - An indication of how the ministry of the suffragan bishop is expected to complement that of the diocesan and fit into the overall pattern of episcopal ministry within the diocese.
  - A note of how the diocesan delegates to the suffragan bishops(s) – for example how an Instrument of Delegation works in practice or, if there is none, how delegation is agreed and monitored.
  - A note of what structures and what provision is made for professional oversight and development of the suffragan bishop.
  - An outline of any pan-diocesan responsibilities (even if these may be fine-tuned or adjusted subsequently in the light of the particular skills and experience of whoever is appointed).
  - An indication of any responsibilities outside of the diocese that the role might be expected to take.
  - How the role relates to any diocesan mission strategy and how the role relates to other senior members of the team.
  - How the role relates to the wider Church of England Vision and Strategy.
  - An indication of how the diocesan bishop will take into consideration the Five Guiding Principles and diverse constituencies when appointing to the role.
  - A brief overview of the episcopal area and particular challenges or mission focus – whether that is a geographical area that will be overseen by the suffragan (if there is an area scheme – ideally with a map that explains the episcopal area covered), the diocese as a whole, or the portfolio area of responsibility.
  - Ministry statistics and some statistics outlining the demography of the area.

21. In giving thought to the intended role of the suffragan the Commission recognises that neither scripture nor tradition provide a blueprint for episcopal ministry, but it would expect that the role would be consonant with what is set out in the [Ordinal for the consecration of bishops](#). There are a number of other resources that may be useful reference sources:

- [Faith & Order Commission \(FAOC\) report on Senior Leadership \(2015\)](#)
- GSMisc733 House of Bishops occasional paper on Suffragan Bishops (2004)

#### *Presentation to the Commission*

22. The bishop is invited to present the proposal to the Dioceses Commission during the meeting at which the see is to be considered. Ideally this will be in person, but provision can be made for the bishop to join via video conferencing. She or he will be invited to speak for around 5-10 minutes and then to take questions from Commission members. It is preferable that the presentation is made by the diocesan bishop, however if the bishop is unable to attend she or he is welcome to send a representative with an appropriate level of authority to speak to the proposal in her/his stead.
23. The Commission will not discuss or vote on the proposal in the presence of the bishop and will withhold its decisions until it has considered all of the proposals before it in the course of that meeting.

#### Financial considerations

24. Arrangements for the financial support provided by the Church Commissioners for episcopal ministry mean that the amount expended by them has, since 1 January 2011, no longer been directly consequent upon the number of bishops in the diocese. The decision to fill a suffragan see will not lead to any immediate change in the funding allocated to the diocesan bishop by the Church Commissioners for episcopal ministry in the particular diocese, or overall, because the new postholder and their fellow bishops in the diocese will be expected to live within the existing budget. The decision not to fill a particular suffragan see will result in savings in stipend and working costs in that diocese which in subsequent years may be taken into account when allocating funds for episcopal ministry between dioceses but it will not have an impact in the short term on the total funding provided by the Church Commissioners for episcopal ministry. However, if the decision is taken over a period of time not to fill a number of suffragan sees this may eventually lead to a reduction in the funding required for episcopal ministry.

#### Response by the Commission

25. The Commission is required to notify the bishop and the archbishop within two months of receiving notification from the bishop of his or her proposal to fill the vacant see either that it agrees with the proposal or that it believes that the proposal requires further consideration (involving the full procedure for creating a new suffragan see). During this two-month period, the Commission may seek clarification from the bishop regarding aspects of the reasons for proposing to fill the see mentioned in his or her proposal. In some cases it may suggest that the bishop withdraws a submission and submits it in a substantially revised form.
26. Bishops may find it helpful to consult the Secretary of the Commission in advance of the point at which they send their formal notification.
27. Should the Commission approve the filling of the see, it will then be for the diocesan bishop to initiate the appointment process in liaison with the Archbishops' Appointments Secretary. A guide

for diocesan bishops regarding the appointment process to suffragan sees is available from the Archbishops' Advisors for Appointments and Developments Office.

On behalf of the Dioceses Commission:  
Dame Caroline Spelman, Chair  
January 2023