

## HOUSE OF BISHOPS

## Crown Nominations Commission

September 2024

## Introduction

1. Following the request by a group of bishops, under SO3 of the House of Bishops Standing Orders, for an urgent meeting of the House of Bishops to consider the current challenges facing the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC), this paper has been prepared to support the House in its consideration of those challenges, and to update and seek the views of the House on the potential short and longer-term steps being proposed to address them. In preparing this paper, advice was sought from the Advisory Group for Appointments and Vocations, who endorsed the need for action to be taken and considered the potential proposals outlined in this paper.
2. For the second time in a relatively short period of time (Carlisle in December 2023 and Ely in July 2024), the CNC considering the appointment of a Diocesan Bishop has not been able reach the level of consensus required to make a nomination. This has been deeply disappointing, particularly for all those involved, but also for the dioceses concerned, which are both facing significant missional challenges. The Diocese of Carlisle will not have a new substantive Diocesan Bishop until the Autumn of 2025 (+James Newcome retired in August 2023) and the Diocese of Ely will now not have a substantive Diocesan Bishop in post until late Spring/early Summer 2026 (+Stephen Conway became Bishop of Lincoln in July 2023). In the 15 years to the end of 2022 the CNC process failed to appoint twice out of 55 vacancy processes. Since the start of 2023 through to July 2024, the process has failed to nominate twice out of six occasions.
3. Across the Church, confidence in the CNC process was knocked significantly by the failure to nominate in Carlisle, not least with individuals who were being drawn into CNC processes, and in other dioceses that were beginning on their discernment journeys. Based on the significant amount of correspondence and feedback received since the announcement of the failure to nominate in Ely, confidence in the CNC has fallen even further with some candidates (from across the breadth of church traditions, but particularly those from under-represented groups) refusing to have their names added to longlists, and others openly questioning the integrity of the process. Allegations of politicking in the Vacancy in See process are commonplace with routine commentary (again from across the breadth of church tradition) that Vacancy in See Committees are electing six members to the CNC who are not representative of the range of traditions within the diocese.
4. The reference points for this paper are the General Synod [Standing Orders](#) (136-141A) and the [Vacancy in See Committees Regulation 2024](#).

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### Overview of paper

5. This paper outlines the context and invites the House of Bishops to consider and take a view on a series of proposals intended to address the current challenges or, at least, mitigate the impact of them with the aim of restoring confidence in the CNC process. In considering the proposals outlined in this paper and forming a view, the House should be aware that it is being invited to endorse proposals that would be put forward to other bodies for further consideration and decision making, ultimately, General Synod. The proposals are:
  - a) Changes to the General Synod Standing Orders
  - b) Changes to the Vacancy in See Committees Regulation
  - c) A 'Code of Conduct' for CNC members
  - d) A longer-term review of CNC Central Member elections

### Action points

6. The House is asked to consider the Crown Nominations Commission in light of the failed nominations to Carlisle and Ely and to express its views on the proposals outlined in sections 11-14 of this paper.

### A process of discernment?

7. In his report, 'Discerning in Obedience', Professor Oliver O'Donovan writes about discernment being "...a step of faith enabling us to conceive something that God will bring about, which is not yet objectively visible." In order to reach a discernment, he adds that "...it is essential not to try to know the end from the beginning. If CNC members approach their meeting with the names of their preferred candidates already fixed in their minds, they are likely to miss seeing what God intends them to see. Their horizon will be determined by their pre-judgments. Pre-judgments are well and good; we need to have formed them if we are ever to learn anything new. But we can learn new things only as we advance from our pre-judgments, and allow what is yet to unfold to be unfolded. For CNC members this crystallises into a clear rule: they must approach their task expecting to be shown something, to find a bishop whom perhaps they have never heard or thought of."
8. Concerns have been raised by a range of people involved in CNCs, including candidates and CNC members, about how the process works in practice and the way that underrepresented groups appear to be less likely to be nominated. It is also widely considered that National Church politics may be impacting CNC processes. Whatever the reason for the failure to nominate in particular cases, it is important to remember that, however difficult these things are, it is the prerogative of each individual member of a CNC to vote according to conscience in the way that they believe is best for the witness of the Gospel in the diocese being considered. This paper, and the suggestions that arise from it, is not intended to impugn or question the individual decisions of individual members, but the failure to appoint in two dioceses in relatively quick succession means the question is

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being asked whether the CNC process is meeting the needs of the Church and enabling the proper flourishing of discernment under God?

9. In the statement announcing the latest failed nomination, the Archbishop of Canterbury stated that: "Together with the Archbishop of York and others, there will also need to be a period of reflection on the implications of this decision on the Church of England more generally." Understandably, there are calls for changes to be made to the CNC process and, whilst the holding of a wide 'O'Donovan-style' review could be one route forward, given the urgency of the situation caused by what has happened and the ensuing lack of confidence in the CNC process from across the breadth of traditions in the Church, it is felt that more immediate action is needed. Some have suggested that all CNCs should be paused until process changes can be made, but this is complicated.
10. If the CNC process is to work well, and if the Church is to have confidence in it, those participating must have confidence that it is a discernment process under God and not one of pre-judgements, tribalism or politics, which is now the perceived fear across the breadth of traditions in the Church, but particularly from those who are under-represented in senior roles.

**Proposed changes to General Synod Standing Orders**

11. The current CNC processes are included in the General Synod Standing Orders (SOs 136 – 141A), which could be considered and (subject to agreement) be changed by Synod in February 2025. There is also the power for the CNC to report to General Synod on matters of general concern within its responsibility (SO 136(4)). The failure to have appointed twice should be deemed an expedient matter for the CNC to give an account of its actions and a report could be submitted for General Synod to discuss as a take note motion in February 2025.
12. Under SO 136(3) the CNC "must agree upon the name of one candidate for submission to the Prime Minister." Repeated failure to do so implies failures in the CNC, which the General Synod should seek to remedy. The following changes are being proposed to improve the likelihood of each CNC making a nomination. These are to remove the secret ballot, change the threshold required for a nomination, to give the presiding Archbishop an additional vote in the event of a deadlock and the mandated resignation of the Central CNC members should they fail to make a nomination on three occasions during a five-year term.
  - a) Remove the secret ballot. Voting for a nomination takes place in a secret ballot (SO 141(6)). This allows members of the CNC who are not wishing to make a nomination from those interviewed able to conceal the fact, and ensures the process is not open or transparent. The most commonly expressed concern about the CNC is that members could participate in blocking candidates while being able to deny the fact due to the secret ballot. It is proposed that SO 141(6) should be amended to turn the secret ballot into an open ballot to ensure that CNC members are accountable to the rest of the CNC for their voting and to improve transparency and trust.

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- b) Change the threshold required for a nomination and the removal of abstentions when calculating the vote. SO 141(6) requires “at least two-thirds of the total number of the voting members of the Commission” to vote in favour of a nomination. However, “at least two-thirds” of the 14 members of a normal CNC is 10 out of 14, or 71.4% of the vote. Note that 10 votes in favour of nomination are required even if some of the members entitled to vote choose to abstain. This places a high bar to clear for a nomination to be made and underlies the failure of two recent CNCs to do so. Changing the threshold to “at least 60% of the total number of votes cast” would require 9 out of 14, or 64.2% of the vote. This would place the threshold much closer to the intended two-thirds while retaining the need for a super-majority to approve a nomination. In the case of the Canterbury CNC, where there are 17 voting members on the Commission, a two-thirds majority would require 12 votes (70.5% of the total) while a 60% majority would require 11 (64.7% of the total). If abstentions do not count towards the required threshold, there is still at least 50% agreement required even if the required threshold is reduced to 60% and the Chair has a casting vote (see (c) below).
- c) Presiding Archbishop additional vote should three consecutive votes between the final two candidates fail to meet the threshold for nomination. It is the practice of the CNC to vote in rounds until the necessary threshold to secure a nomination is reached. Early rounds tend to rule out candidates with limited support. However, in later rounds a deadlock can occur with repeated rounds continuing to fall short of the required number of votes. It is proposed that an amendment be made to Standing Orders to provide the presiding Archbishop with one extra casting vote should the CNC reach a point that it is unable to secure a nomination. This extra vote would tip the balance in the instance of the CNC being just short of agreement, but would not alter the outcome if the CNC was two or more votes off being able to nominate a candidate. [Note that under the current composition of the CNC (14 for most nominations, 17 for Canterbury), there would still need to be a supermajority among the votes from the members other than the presiding Archbishop/Chair to guarantee an appointment. At the 2/3rds majority there would need to be 8 out of 13 (61.5%) voting in favour, at the 60% level it would be 7 out of 13 (53.8%). For Canterbury it would be 10 out of 16 at the 2/3rds level (62.5%) and 9 out of 16 (56.3%) at the 60% level].

**Additional changes**

13. The following wider changes are also proposed to be considered at the February 2025 General Synod:

- a) Changes to Vacancy in See Committees Regulations. The imbalance of Vacancy in See Committees (ViSC), which can make them unrepresentative should also be addressed. Whilst there is not time to change the Regulation before the next triennium of ViSCs being elected, it is proposed that this should still be addressed for the longer term.

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- I. The main change would be to ensure that no more than one clergy person and one lay person can serve from any one parish or church community. Where there are ex-officio members on the ViSC, e.g. General Synod members, this would prevent other clergy or laity from their parish being able to be elected. The only time more than one priest or more than one lay person could serve from the same parish or church community would be when they are all ex-officio members. When it comes to electing the six CNC members to the CNC from the ViSC, it is proposed that there should be a restriction of only one person (either clergy or lay) per parish or church community.
  
- II. It is also proposed that there is a reserved place among the clergy places for one priest who is female, should a priest who is female be standing for election. This would also extend to lay representatives, ensuring at least one place for a female lay person should one stand for election. *[The requirement for female representation already exists in the Canterbury CNC regulations for the five representatives from the Anglican Communion, so there is a precedent. The Canterbury CNC reps from the Anglican Communion are also required to include some of Global Majority Heritage, and GMH representation on all CNCs has already been addressed through amendments to Synod Standing Orders agreed in July 2024 (see paper GS 2355). It would, therefore, make sense for the representation of women (including in a voting capacity) to be included in wider CNCs].*
  
- III. An early review of the ViSC Regulation could also provide an opportunity to consider/implement the [recommendations](#) of the Independent Reviewer, Canon Maggie Swinson, on the process leading to the nomination of the Bishop of Blackburn, namely:
  - a. Should a suffragan bishop be eligible to Chair the ViSC?
  - b. The introduction of a minimum timetable for diocesan consultations
  
- b) A 'Code of Conduct' for CNC members. While it would not be enforceable, a Code of Conduct could be called upon if the actions of members are failing to fulfil their function. Other Committees have found it useful that there is a Code of Conduct for Synod members, which can be referenced if there is a need to highlight behaviour that falls short of the expectations of the Code. The need to affirm the 'Five Guiding Principles' would be included in the Code.

### Longer-term review

14. As well as the above proposed changes to the General Synod Standing Orders and the Vacancy in See Committees Regulation, a longer-term review of the CNC elections may be necessary to address more widely held concerns about the operation of the CNC and representation amongst the Central Members, including gender, disability, geography (there is only one Central Member from the Northern

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Province) and church tradition. It is proposed that further consideration for changing the election to the Central CNC membership should happen after February 2025, so as to keep changes to Standing Orders and the ViSC Regulation separate from changes to the Central CNC member elections.

### Next steps

15. Subject to the views of the House of Bishops, a formal proposal would be developed for consultation with the CNC Central Members at their next meeting with the Archbishops in November, before being submitted to the Standing Order Committee for them to report to General Synod in February 2025.

**+Sarah Mullally**  
**Bishop of London**  
**and Chair of the Advisory Group for Appointments and Vocations**

## ANNEX

### 1. Individuals nominated by the Crown Nominations Commission since 2018

	Women	% of total	Men	% of total	UKME/GMH	% of total	White	% of total
<b>2018-2022</b>								
Nominated	5	31%	11	69%	2	13%	14	88%
<b>2023-2024</b>								
Nominated	2	33%	4	67%	1	17%	5	83%

N.B. Due to the small numbers of individuals involved, and for reasons of confidentiality, we are unable to publish demographic data beyond that relating to those nominated.

### 2. Current CNC Central Members

Ms Christina Baron  
 The Reverend Paul Benfield  
 Miss Debbie Buggs  
 The Reverend Canon Andrew Cornes  
 Miss Prudence Dailey  
 The Reverend Lis Goddard  
 The Reverend Canon Claire Lording  
 The Reverend Esther Prior  
 The Reverend Jo Stobart  
 Mr Clive Scowen

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### 3. Members of the Advisory Group for Appointments and Vocations

The Right Reverend and Right Honourable Dame Sarah Mullally (Chair)  
 The Right Reverend Arun Arora  
 Canon Dr Jamie Harrison  
 Canon Julie Jones  
 The Venerable Pete Spiers  
 The Very Reverend Abi Thompson

### 4. Terms of Reference of the Advisory Group for Appointments and vocations

There will be a group known as the Advisory Group for Appointments and Vocations (AGAV).

#### **1. The objectives of the Advisory Group for Appointments and Vocations**

The role of the Advisory Group for Appointments and Vocations is to:

- I. Provide advice and support to the Archbishops' Advisers for Appointments and Vocations team to ensure that its work is enabled to properly advise the Archbishops of Canterbury and York.
- II. To contribute views to the discussion of issues which impact on senior appointments and vocations, and those who might be considered for senior appointments or for appointment to other strategic leadership roles.
- III. To contribute to, and advise on, the reviewing, designing and shaping of policy and processes in relation to the work of the team.

#### **2. Membership of the Advisory Group for Appointments and Vocations**

- I. The membership of AGAV shall be:
  - A Chair\*, who must be a member of the House of Bishops, to be appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York acting jointly.
  - A Suffragan Bishop\*, to be appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York acting jointly.
  - A Dean\*, to be appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York acting jointly having consulted the Chair of the College of Deans.
  - A member of the Development Advisory Group to be appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York acting jointly having consulted the Chair of that Group.
  - Two lay people with experience in the work of the Archbishops' Advisers for Appointments and Vocations team to be appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York acting jointly.

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York, acting jointly having consulted the Chair, will be able to co-opt additional member(s), where required.

Every effort should be made to ensure diverse representation on the Group.

\*An individual who is not normally involved in discernment processes.

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- II. Members will serve for a term of 3 years, but may be reappointed on the provision of advice by the Chair to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York.
- III. No member of AGAV may serve for more than two terms, unless the Archbishops of Canterbury and York determine otherwise having received advice from the Chair.
- IV. No business may be transacted at any meeting of AGAV unless at least 3 members are present.
- V. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York will receive the Minutes from the Group's meetings and will be kept updated on the Group's work by the Archbishops' Secretary for Appointments.
- VI. AGAV may in all other respects regulate its own procedure.

### 3. Frequency of meetings

- I. The Advisory Group for Appointments and Vocations will meet twice a year, or more frequently, as required.

### 4. Expectations of members

Members are expected to:

- I. To participate in, and engage fully with, the Group's work.
- II. To respect the confidentiality of the Group's work in advising and supporting the work of the Archbishops' Advisers for Appointments and Vocations team.
- III. To participate reflectively and respectfully to discussions in line with the NCI's Values.

### 5. Responsibilities

- I. The Chair will agree the agenda for each meeting, after consultation with the Archbishops' Secretary for Appointments.
- II. The Archbishops' Advisers for Appointments and Vocations team will provide administrative support to the Group, including but not limited to:
  - Scheduling meetings
  - Circulating agendas and relevant papers
  - Minuting the meeting

### 6. Review

- I. The Terms of Reference will be reviewed on an annual basis, or earlier, as required.