

Guidance for 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 sees¹ 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 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 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. 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.
10. In the dioceses that have Area Systems (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.
11. 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.

¹ 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. The Commission occasionally receives proposals to revive dormant sees or those that would result in a net increase in episcopal ministry. The Commission needs to set a high bar when considering such proposals. Accordingly, it would expect the evidence to be particularly compelling and to have demonstrated real creativity in thinking through alternative models for ministry and how an increase in leadership could be sustainable for the Church of England.

12.1 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.

13. The Commission has noted that a common reason for a need for a suffragan bishop that is cited is the demands of the Lords Spiritual or national responsibilities on the diocesan bishop's time. The Commission is of course sympathetic to this, but would not consider this as a sole reason for agreeing with the proposal to fill the see. The Commission asks to see compelling reasons aside from this aspect for the filling of the see that focus on the potential benefits for mission and ministry in the diocese.

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 Church of England 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 two 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 four pages and a draft job description for the role 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. However, the Commission strongly requests that the proposal itself be kept to four pages.

17. 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.

18. 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.

19. The Commission has produced the following structure and questions to help bishops ensure that the Commission's key considerations are included in the proposal. This can either be used as a guide for crafting a bespoke proposal document or as a proforma if bishops would like simply to answer the questions and submit his/her proposal in that way. The structure is also available separately at the end of this document.

19.1 Introduction: the vacancy

Include indication of Diocesan Synod approval and brief details and outcomes of any more widespread consultation

19.2 The context for an appointment

19.2.1 Diocesan overview

A brief overview of the current context for the diocese, its successes, challenges, and plans/strategy for the future.

19.2.2 Local area overview (if relevant)

A brief overview of the formal area (if relevant) or geographical location where the bishop will minister. What are the local challenges and opportunities?

19.2.3 Plans and intentions for the diocese over the next 5-10 years.

19.3 The case for a suffragan bishop

19.3.1 The need for an episcopal role

19.3.2 Areas of responsibility for the suffragan bishop

19.3.3 Priorities and challenges for the see

19.3.4 If the see were not to be filled what would the consequences be?

19.3.5 What consideration has been given to other ways of covering the ministry?

19.3.6 When was the senior leadership structure and/or Area Scheme last reviewed and are there plans to do so again?

19.3.7 The Five Guiding Principles and the breadth of tradition

How have traditional catholic and complementarian perspectives been taken into consideration regarding the proposal to fill this see? Is it appropriate to use this vacancy to increase diversity of tradition amongst the bishops? Would it be appropriate or would you be able to appoint someone from a traditional catholic or complementarian background to the role?

19.3.8 Are there other areas of diversity that could be fulfilled through this role?

19.4 The role of the suffragan bishop alongside the diocesan bishop

19.4.1 How do you minister and operate across the diocese as diocesan bishop?

19.4.2 How would you delegate to the suffragan bishop and how will you complement each other as episcopal colleagues?

19.4.3 How will the role fit into the overall pattern of episcopal ministry within the diocese (if there is more than one suffragan bishop in the diocese), and with other senior leaders.

19.4.4 How do national and other responsibilities affect your ministry to your diocese?

19.5 Collaboration with other dioceses

What collaboration exists already? What are you planning next to deepen collaboration with neighbouring dioceses? How could you share 'back-office' functions? What opportunities are you working on for collaboration in operations or ministry?

19.6 Annexes:

- Draft role description (essential)
- Diocesan map (essential)
- Fuller area profile (if desired)
- Diocesan ministry statistics (desirable)
- Any other information relevant to the submission

20. 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 other resources that may be useful reference sources:

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

Presentation to the Commission

21. 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 unless the Commission is meeting online, but provision can be made for the bishop to join via video conferencing if needs be. She or he will be invited to speak for around 5-10 minutes and then to take questions from Commission members (usually another 10-15 minutes). The presentation should be made by the diocesan bishop, however in exceptional circumstances if the bishop is unable to attend she/he is able to send a representative with an appropriate level of authority to speak to the proposal in her/his stead.
22. The Commission will not discuss or vote on the proposal in the presence of the bishop but will do so later on in the course of the meeting.

Confidentiality

23. The Commission will presume that all information shared with it is confidential and Commission members will treat it accordingly. The Commission will ask the submitting bishop's permission before sharing any information beyond the Commission members and supporting NCI staff. Please be careful not to include personal data unless it is essential. The Secretary would be happy to discuss this with you if helpful.

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 provincial archbishop within two months of receiving notification² 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. During this two-month

² This is the date at which the Secretary receives the final version of the submission paperwork

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. The Secretary to the Commission will inform the diocesan bishop of the outcome of the Commission's decision in a formal letter which is copied to the provincial archbishop and the Archbishops' Appointments Secretary. This will be sent as soon as possible after the Commission's meeting.
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 Vocations Office.

On behalf of the Dioceses Commission:
Dame Caroline Spelman, *Chair*
Jenny Axtell, *Secretary*
April 2025

Pro-forma for suffragan see submissions to the Dioceses Commission

To complete within 4 pages

1. Introduction: the vacancy

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3.2 Areas of responsibility for the suffragan bishop

3.3 Priorities and challenges for the see

3.4 If the see were not to be filled what would the consequences be?

3.5 What consideration has been given to other ways of covering the ministry?

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4.4 How do national and other responsibilities affect your ministry to your diocese?

(It should be noted that, whilst the Dioceses Commission is sympathetic to this issue, it would not consider this as a sole reason for filling a suffragan see).

5. Collaboration with other dioceses

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