

Supporting Local Ministry for the Church's Future

Diocesan Synod Summary – 24 September 2026

Diocesan Synod met on 24 September for an evening focused on the support of local churches, diocesan finances and the future funding of mission and ministry. The meeting was chaired by Stephen Adshead and began with worship led by Matt Long and Liam, one of the Ministry Experience Scheme participants.

Presidential Address

In his presidential address, Bishop Martyn reflected on the developments that have taken place since the publication in 2018 of Deep Wells and Green Pastures, the report of the Rural Commission which he had established in response to concerns that some rural churches and schools felt overlooked. He acknowledged the significant social and political changes that have taken place since then, including the pandemic, international conflict and continuing pressure on local communities.

The Bishop described the importance of the Church's continuing presence in rural communities, where small congregations often care for historic buildings and sustain the life of places which may have lost other community facilities. He recognised that some churches still feel overlooked and that not every church is able to offer a service each Sunday. The Rural Commission had highlighted the pressures faced by clergy and congregations and helped to shape the development of Minster Communities as a way of providing greater mutual support. The intention is that every church should have a focal minister, whether ordained or lay, stipendiary or self-supporting.

The Bishop also spoke about the changing financial context. Diocesan income has fallen significantly in real terms since 2018, while an increasing proportion of national funding is directed towards lowest-income communities. Against this background, diocesan trustees have reviewed the use of diocesan resources and agreed that income generated from the sale and investment of land should support ten additional stipendiary clergy posts. These posts will be introduced gradually, distributed across the Diocese and deployed within Minster Communities. In conclusion Bishop Martyn felt that there remains much to celebrate and that the Rural Commission has played an important part in shaping the Diocese's work over the past eight years.

Listening to Children and Young People

Matt Long introduced a consultation with children and young people which will continue over the next four meetings of Synod. Synod members heard about young people's views on priorities for the use of diocesan resources. Feedback from Synod will in turn be shared with the children and young people involved.

The discussion highlighted the importance of investing in children and young people and explored how their priorities relate to the diocesan budget. Members noted that much investment in this area takes place through local churches and reflected on the relationship between diocesan spending and resources available at parish level.

Draft Budget for 2027

Simon Wilson and David Palmer presented the first draft of the 2027 budget ahead of further consideration at the November meeting of Synod. Members were also invited to a seminar on 22 October at which the budget would be explored in more detail.

The draft budget showed a proposed deficit of just under £1 million, a substantial reduction from a deficit of nearly £3 million three years ago. This improvement has required reductions in clergy numbers, central staffing and other costs. The presentation nevertheless indicated that the financial position is moving gradually towards greater security, while recognising the need to continue reviewing expenditure and managing time-limited national funding carefully.

Synod heard more about the proposal to fund ten additional stipendiary clergy posts made possible through the successful development and targeted sale of glebe land. The proceeds have been invested in higher income yielding assets, having regard to ethical guidance, and will provide an ongoing return to support the posts. Members were assured that the proposed posts are intended to be financially sustainable and that careful consideration will be given to where they are placed, in line with diocesan strategic priorities and the development of Minster Communities.

Questions covered the future sustainability of work currently supported through time-limited national funding, the use of total return accounting to fund the additional clergy posts, diocesan property and the costs associated with St Martins House. Claire Bampton explained that sustainability planning was taking place with churches and that learning from existing projects would inform decisions about how parishes and Minster Communities should be supported in future. Members also asked questions about staff pay and the impact on employees when national funding for their post comes to an end.

Written Questions

Written questions had been received regarding the Rural Commission report and work on the Seal of the Confessional in relation to safeguarding disclosures. Written answers were circulated and Bishop Martyn responded to supplementary questions on these topics.

National Funding and the Future of Mission

Carl Hughes, the Chair of the Finance Committee of the Archbishops' Council then addressed Synod on national Church funding arrangements. He argued that the Church's financial difficulties are closely connected to declining attendance and highlighted the uneven distribution of income, assets and reserves between parishes and dioceses. He explained the need to balance support for the Church of today with investment in its future and described the national emphasis on front-line ministry, mission and growth.

The presentation prompted a wide-ranging discussion about rural ministry, cathedrals, ministry in areas of deprivation, vocations, disability, accessibility and the complexity of administering local churches. Members questioned how national funding decisions are made, how their effects are evaluated and how local experience is communicated to the national Church.

Carl Hughes emphasised that national investment is not confined to large or new initiatives, but also supports parish revitalisation and ministry with children and young people. He recognised that funded work can take time to demonstrate its full impact. Discussion also considered the sustainability of the Church's presence across changing communities, the need for new Christian communities in areas of housing growth and the importance of ecumenical ministry where appropriate.

Questions about disability and accessibility highlighted the need for churches to become genuinely accessible rather than treating this as an optional addition. Synod heard that national funding has supported accessibility projects and that funding may be available to help parishes address disability-related needs. Members also raised racial justice and work with people of global majority heritage, emphasising the importance of understanding the difference that such investment makes.

Final Business

In final business, Synod approved two amendments to Standing Orders which allow additional time for amendments to agenda items be submitted and make provision for the appointment of a Lead Safeguarding Trustee to the Trustee Board.

Stephen Adshead then read a proclamation from General Synod, and the meeting closed with prayer led by Bishop Martyn.