



DIOCESAN SYNOD SYNOD QUESTIONS NOTICE PAPER

This notice paper was seated at the meeting, but now includes answers and questions to supplementary questions asked by the questioner.

Question 1

Q The Revd Martin Hislop [Kingston Deanery]

Mindful of the need to ensure that respect for all is encouraged and affirmed in our Church Schools but in light of recent disturbing employment cases in Church Schools in Wales and elsewhere in England, can Synod be assured that Diocesan Church Schools are not pursuing policies or procedures that call into question or undermine school staff who seek to uphold the Church's traditional teachings and doctrine relating to the sanctity and integrity of life especially in areas such as Abortion, Euthanasia and Gender?

A Roz Cordner

All schools must adhere to the Equalities Act 2010. This provides protection for individuals from discrimination, harassment and victimisation based on 9 protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Policies and procedures supporting staff codes of conduct are shaped by the Equalities Act.

The school curriculum includes statutory delivery of Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) which makes up part of the content for Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE). Within this subject, and at age-appropriate stages, Church of England schools address sensitive topics such as abortion and euthanasia with a focus on providing balanced, factual information while respecting the sanctity of life and the Church's teachings.

QQ The Revd Martin Hislop [Kingston Deanery]

Regarding the policies and procedures in this area that are implemented by each school, is there any monitoring or assessment of those policies by the Board?

AA Roz Cordner

Any policies and procedures that the SDBE send out to schools are scrutinised by the Policy & Strategy Committee and then shared with the Schools Committee, shared with the Headteachers Committee and then goes to the Board. They are scrutinised as they go out for approval and once in schools, it is their duty to deliver them. The SDBE works with schools and assist the governors in delivering these statutory policies.

Question 2

Q The Revd Martin Hislop [Kingston Deanery]

What is the number of people who have completed and not successfully completed Safeguarding Training in 2024?

A The Diocesan Secretary

The Safeguarding training team and our training volunteers' combined efforts have resulted in 2,674 people completing training courses throughout 2024. This includes over 1,400 foundation, 158 safer recruitment, over 550 domestic abuse training courses, and over 360 leadership courses.

Training data is scrutinised at quarterly, independently chaired Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel meetings and Archdeacons are provided with reports to follow up on clergy and licensed lay ministers whose training is not up to date.

Over 70 people are booked onto, or are part way through completing, the leadership course from 2024 through into this year. There is a backlog of training for the remainder of people who have not yet completed the course, for various reasons, and a review of course numbers, timings, and location has been reviewed to ensure that there is enough space for training to be held as there are courses currently running with many vacant spaces.

We are currently conducting a data cleansing exercise to ensure that the training data we hold is better utilised for future planning.

QQ The Revd Martin Hislop [Kingston Deanery]

Has everyone who undertook a safeguarding course successfully passed?

AA The Diocesan Secretary

The Diocese does not monitor training completed online and administered by the National Church (Basic Awareness, Foundation), but Parish Safeguarding Officers are able to access data for their parish.

For training administered by the Diocese (Leadership), we regularly monitor the data on those who have not completed the training which is continually reviewed by the Archdeacons and annually by the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel and Audit & Risk Committee. It is the individual responsibility of those who need to renew their training, but the Diocese does send reminders when this is overdue.

Question 3

Q The Revd Marcus Gibbs [Tooting Deanery]

In the last 3 weeks, the Church Times has carried a number of letters expressing concern about clergy pensions and retirement housing. Three weeks ago, a Facebook page was started for those feeling concerned about this issue, and almost 2,000 clergy and spouses have joined that group. On Friday the Church Times carried a front page article, a lead article, as well as a letter signed by over 700 clergy and spouses (including myself) expressing concern and calling for action to reverse the cuts to the pensions made in 2011.

Has the Bishop's Staff Team discussed the impact on clergy morale and wellbeing of the 2011 cut to pensions and what action is being taken or will be taken by Southwark senior staff towards pension restoration?

A Mark Rhodes & The Diocesan Secretary

Clergy wellbeing has been discussed extensively by the Bishop's Staff Team, encompassing both financial and non-financial aspects. At a Diocesan level we have a Dean of Clergy Wellbeing, Leanne Roberts to look after many of the non-financial aspects of clergy wellbeing. The Director of Discipleship, Lay Ministry and Continuing Ministerial Education runs annual pre-retirement courses at Wychcroft. They last for 48 hours and are offered to all clergy in their late fifties and beyond and encompass preparation for the change of role and status that retirement brings and pensions and housing. Representatives from the Pensions Board who deal with pensions and retired clergy housing come and speak both to the whole group and offer individual consultations. The

Diocesan Clergy Retirement Officer, The Revd Canon Dr Sue Clarke, attends the course and the Rt Revd Michale Doe, one of our Assistant Bishops acts as Chaplain.

We have identified a need to begin to talk about pensions earlier in ministry and as a result the Discipleship, Lay Ministry and Continuing Ministerial Education is proposing to offer sessions on pensions and housing with the Pensions Board a couple of times a year which would be open to all clergy with an especial encouragement to our younger clergy so that they can be informed about additional voluntary contributions etc. We hope to launch these days later this year.

The level of clergy pensions is set by the Church of England Pensions Board, not the Dioceses, and is a proportion of the National Minimum Stipend. The contributions to fund pensions have been paid by Dioceses since 1998 when the Church Commissioners moved the liability from themselves to the Dioceses. There is an actuarial review of the clergy pension scheme underway and if there is surplus, we understand that the Pensions Board is looking at whether this could be used to enhance the retirement benefits of clergy. In addition, in 2026 there will be a significant increase in the National Minimum Stipend which will increase all clergy pensions. The Diocese is committed to funding the extra pension contributions this will require.

QQ The Revd Marcus Gibbs [Tooting Deanery]

Could you confirm whether the Southwark bishops and senior diocesan staff have made any formal representations, are actively engaged, or are willing to engage at a national level, to the press, the Pension Board, and Archbishops' Council for the restoration of clergy pensions?

AA The Bishop of Southwark

Practically speaking, the proposed stipend increase to £34,000 (7.3% increase in Southwark) by April 2026, as a result of the national Diocesan Finance Review, will impact pensions going forward as they are calculated on the basis of the National Minimum Stipend. This will not fully address the underlying issues which you are describing, and I agree that a further piece of work specifically on Clergy Pensions will need to be undertaken. As a Diocese, as you know, there are a number actively engaged in these conversations at a national level and I am committed to the importance of having full, supportive engagement with this fundamental matter for Clergy Wellbeing.