

**Note of business transacted at a meeting of  
the Newcastle Diocesan Synod held on  
Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2024 at 10:00am  
at Newcastle Cathedral.**

The President was the Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Revd Dr Helen-Ann Hartley, and the meeting was chaired by the Chair of the House of Clergy, the Revd Canon Brian Hurst. The Registrar, Laura Peace was in attendance. The Chair of the House of Laity, Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth gave her apologies.

The Register, attached, recorded 49 members; 7 visitors; and 10 officers in attendance.

**1. Welcome and opening worship**

The Bishop of Newcastle welcomed members to the meeting and thanked the Cathedral for their hospitality. The Bishop congratulated the Interim Director of Education, Gill Booth, and the Bishop's Advisor for the Environment, the Revd Tim Mayfield, on the arrival of their new grandchildren and the Chair of the Newcastle Diocesan Board of Education, the Revd Gill Alexander on the birth of her new great nephew. The Bishop also invited Synod to celebrate and pray for the upcoming marriage of Administration Support Officer, Kyrinn Whitaker and her partner Ben Gill.

The Bishop led the opening prayer.

*The Revd Canon Brian Hurst took the chair*

**2. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence had been received from 26 members.

**3. Declarations of Interest**

No new declarations of interest were made.

**4. Meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2024**

**4.1 Note of business transacted on 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2024** (paper DS24 09)

The Synod noted and approved the business transacted.

**4.2 Matters arising**

- i. In connection to the question raised on casual fees at Item 6 of the last meeting Synod, the Diocesan Secretary noted that casual fees had been increased to £40, with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2024.
- ii. In relation to the General Synod Report (Item 9), the Revd Canon Allan Marks (Newcastle Central) enquired whether there had been any progress with regards to Estate Ministries and General Synod's plans to address the income drop (in real terms) for stipendiary clergy.

The Secretary confirmed that no further information had been received with regards to General Synod's plans concerning Estate Ministries or clergy stipends.

**5. Notices**

There were no notices.

**6. Questions**

No questions were received.

**7. Presidential Address**

*The Chair invited the Bishop of Newcastle to give her Presidential Address to the Synod.*

Bishop Helen-Ann gave a Presidential Address and a copy of the Address is attached to this note.

*After the Address the Bishop invited members of the Strategy Group, John Marshall (Felton, St Michael) and Tara Russell (Children and Youth Team Leader) to speak about the next steps for the Diocesan Vision of 'Seeking, Sharing, Sending'.*

Tara Russell and John Marshall shared with members that the vision of *Seeking, Sharing, Sending* throughout the diocese would work to develop a collaboration between church, community and God. This was an invitation to learn afresh how we might attend where God is working within our communities. It was important that the fear of 'not enough' in terms of numbers, money and influence was addressed in order that we could learn to share in God's work across deaneries and parishes alike.

Tara Russell lead Synod in a prayer and following this, John Marshall invited members to observe a moment of silence to reflect on what God was asking of them individually.

**8. Education** (presentation) (paper DS24 10 supported this item)

*The Chair welcomed the Chair of the Diocesan Education Board, the Revd Gill Alexander, and Interim Diocesan Director of Education, Gill Booth, and invited both the Chair and the Director to share their presentation with Synod.*

The Chair of the Education Board highlighted the power of education to transform the lives of children and that Interim Director's presentation would encourage members to reflect on whether they would like to consider support the work of the Education Board by considering to stand for election to the Education Board in the autumn. The Chair stressed how important the church's involvement in education was and noted that the Education Board must strive to get this partnership right if the diocese was to grow younger and more diverse going forward.

The Chair handed over to the Director who took Synod through a presentation which covered the following key items:

- An introduction to the Joint Education Team (JET) that served Newcastle and Durham Diocese, as well as the Church of England Learning Trusts and Mixed Multi Academy Trusts, which also served both dioceses.
- An overview of JET's responsibilities ranging from: Leadership of Church Schools; Legal and Governance; Land and Buildings; Curriculum and Syllabus; Collective Worship; Equality, Diversity and Spirituality; as well as route to Net Zero targets.
- Key challenges for school leaders and governors which included attendance, closing the gaps/ quality of education, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils, EYFS: communication and language; vocabulary; personal care (which had becoming increasingly important since covid), finance and lack of resources as well as recruitment and retention.
- The importance of creating schools that were safe spaces which offered children equity in opportunity so pupils were able to fulfil their potential, regardless of their socio-economic background.

The Director noted that the upcoming summer period would introduce a period of change for the Education Board as Jo Warner would be leaving her role as Assistant Director of Education School Effectiveness and JET Bursar, Eileen Bell would retire at the end of June.

A copy of the slide presentation is attached to this note.

The Director then lead Synod in a discussion and feedback session related to the recommendations set out on slides 42 and 43 of the presentation.

The Director thanked members for their engagement with the session and asked those who wished to get involved with the work of the Education Board to contact Gill Alexander with any enquiries.

The Chair thanked the Director for their presentation and performative session and also gave thanks to Gill Alexander for their ongoing work as Chair of the Education Board.

**9. Safeguarding** (presentation)

*The Chair invited The Lead Officer for the Chaplaincy to Survivors, Dr Maggi Creese to share a video about LOUDfence, which was recently held at Newcastle Cathedral.*

The Lead Officer for the Chaplaincy to Survivors gave an overview of the event held in the first week of March. The Lead Officer explained that 600 knitted strawberries, made as a sign of support for, and solidarity with victims and survivors of child sexual abuse had been displayed on the Cathedral's Fence. The event had included a service of the Word planned by survivors Sarah Troughton, David Creese and David Bark. The LOUDfence installation would remain on display and those wishing to contribute could still add to it. A video of the LOUDfence event was then shared with the Synod.

*The Chair invited questions or comments.*

**Nicola Denyer** (General Synod Member) noted that the service had been extremely moving and the video was a brilliant representation of the event as a whole. Nicola Denyer praised the diocese for leading the way nationally in their work on safeguarding and support for survivors and noted that if members had any related issues that they wished to be raised at General Synod, to contact her directly. **The Revd Dr Rae Caro** (Tynemouth) reported that the service had left attendees moved and inspired and ready to continue the important work going forward.

The Chair thanked The Lead for the Chaplaincy to Survivors and commended her ongoing work.

*The Synod paused for a break.*

**10. Environment** (papers DS24 11 and DS24 12 supported this item)

The Chair noted that Synod would be invited to adopt the Net Zero Action Plan set out in paper DS24 11. The Chair welcomed Net Zero Consultant, Tristan Oliver (via video conferencing), the Director of Mission and Ministry, the Revd Canon Dr Ric Whaite, the Bishop's Advisor on the Environment, the Revd Tim Mayfield, Member of the Environment Working Group, the Revd Tom Birch and Parish Environment Champions, Cynthia M Games, Ella Vickers and Kay Plumley to speak to Synod to support this item of business. The item was split into the following three parts:

i) **Introduction from the Bishop's Advisor on the Environment, the Revd Tim Mayfield, Parish Environment Champions and the Environment Working Group Member**

The Bishop's Advisor introduced Parish Environment Champion, Cynthia Games (from Tynemouth Deanery) who then led Synod through the answers to a series of questions posed to members on carbon emissions. The Bishop's Advisor gave a brief presentation which highlighted the impact of carbon emissions on the environment in real terms, including within his own parish, and introduced Ella Vickers (Gosforth St Nicholas), Kay Plumley (Newcastle St George) and the Revd Tom Birch (Corbridge Deanery) to report practical examples of how parishes were responding to environmental matters.

Ella Vickers reported that the Eco Group at Gosforth St Nicholas had started an organic bread church to raise money towards their parish eco fund as well as theologically and practically exploring the need for homemade bread. The idea had been inspired by Ella's recent trip to Iona during Holy Week where the community used the same recipe for their bread as was used for their Communion bread. Ella explained that the organic bread church began on a Saturday evening when the group met to prepare the bread and share theological reflections on the theme. The following morning after Eucharist, the bread,

along with loaves donated by the congregation, was sold. After two sessions, £200 had been raised. The eco fund would be used to sustainably replace old church boilers.

Kay Plumley informed members that in order to cut carbon emissions and reduce heating costs, Newcastle St George, the church had been exploring fossil fuel alternatives to heat their Grade I listed building. The church had undergone a subsidised energy audit and electrical and heating expert and Chair of the DAC, Canon Roger Styring had been supporting the church to action some of the recommendations that had come out of the audit, such as electrical under-pew heaters and infra-red heaters.

The Revd Tom Birch commended the diocese's ongoing work to install electrical car charging points at vicarages across the diocese. Tom Birch noted that he had had a charge point installed at his own vicarage and encouraged members to make the switch if they could. Tom Birch also reported that Wylam St Oswins had successfully raised sufficient funds to have solar panels installed to the roof of the church hall by a local contractor.

The Chair thanked the Bishop's Advisor, the Parish Environment Champions and members of the Environment Working Group for their presentations and their continued work to support the diocese in cutting carbon emissions and achieving its Net Zero targets.

ii) **The Director of Mission and Ministry, the Revd Canon Dr Ric Whaite**

The Director gave a theological reflection on Creation Care in relation to two verses from Genesis (1:26-28). The reflection is attached to this note.

The Chair thanked the Director for his insightful and pertinent reflection.

iii) **Net Zero Consultant, Tristan Oliver**

Tristan thanked Synod for the invitation to speak to the diocese's Net Zero Carbon Action Plan and provided a brief overview of his experience to date. Tristan began his career in construction as a civil engineer, then moved on to large-scale retro fit projects. Over the past two years Tristan had worked with a number of dioceses to create their Net Zero Action Plans and had also successfully supported the same dioceses through the funding application process.

Tristan explained that the original 90-page plan had been condensed into 28 pages (paper DS24 11) to keep the plan as readable and concise as possible. In order to write the plan Tristan had visited the diocese on 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2024 and met with stakeholders and department heads. The principle aim of the plan was to give the diocese a document and an approach which could be used to progress the diocese's route to Net Zero. The plan could of course be added to should matters arise which needed to be incorporated into the work.

The plan's approach set out to understand what the diocese had in terms of emissions and where they were coming from. Following this, the plan delineated targets and looked at easy wins to be gained that would cost little money but had a sizable impact. The plan also presented successful projects and good news stories from the diocese based on conversations Tristan had during his visit. Tristan noted that he took his role extremely seriously and had taken a great deal of care and effort to write a plan which would set the diocese off with an expectation of hope going forward on their journey to Net Zero.

*The Chair invited questions of clarification before general questions and comments.*

**John Mitchell** (Hexham) asked why there was no mention of switching to hydrogen gases in the plan. In response Tristan explained that switching to green gases was a more

economical and less complex process than the use of hydrogen where heating/power for buildings was concerned as moving to hydrogen would require a new and specific boiler to be fitted. Tristan noted that hydrogen use would more likely be taken up on a large scale in terms of transport rather than buildings. **Dr John Appleby** (Tynemouth) noted that it was good to have a detailed route map but was worried that people would still fear that the plan was unachievable. Dr Appleby asked whether it would be possible to reframe the plan in a positive way that would help people believe it's aims were achievable. Tristan noted that the plan acknowledged that the diocese was taking on a challenging journey and it would take a few years to gauge whether things were moving at a sufficient pace to hit designated targets. Tristan explained that it was likely that most organisations would already have struggled to hit the government specified Net Zero objectives for 2023 however, the approach of the plan was for the diocese to do everything it could to make progress *now*, so in 2028/29 the diocese would be in a far better position when it came to future net zero targets. Tristan further acknowledged that even if the diocese had sufficient funds to carry out the necessary work, there were many other unknowns due to demands on the industry at present and going forward. Tristan noted that of course, if members wished, the document could be reworded to reinforce the plausibility of the aims set out, however what was most important was that work from the action plan began now. **Cynthia Games** (Parish Environment Champion) asked if Tristan could identify some examples of 'quick wins' that parishes would be able to begin work on as soon as possible. In response Tristan suggested that the sections noted within the plan with regards to capacity and creating an Advisory Team were dealt with first and the next step would be to gain a full understanding of the emissions each building produced in order to make the greatest gains for the lowest cost. Behavioural changes could also have a significant impact on emissions and usually cost little to implement. Tristan noted that once the diocese had an improved data set for its emissions, the plan then gave practical examples for parishes to follow.

*The Chair asked for any other further comments before Synod would be asked to adopt the Net Zero plan.*

**The Revd Louise Taylor-Kenyon** (Bamburgh and Glendale) felt in agreement that the Synod should adopt the plan but commented that as finance was key to its full implementation we also had to be realistic and aware of the risks that were set out in within the plan. **Dr John Appleby** (Tynemouth) was happy to adopt the plan but recognised that it was a work in progress as there were still questions regarding how the plan would relate to work streams including the Environment Working Group. **The Revd Captain Steven Dixon** (Tynemouth) commended the plan but noted that it would also need to be conveyed well if it was to be successfully implemented. He asked that the diocese to look for ways to work with fellow dioceses to push for change nationally, particularly where listed buildings were concerned. In response Tristan noted that any work carried out would also have to comply with Local Authority regulations but suggested that if the DAC had a member with an expertise in listed buildings they could be of support with this matter. **The Revd Tom Birch** (Corbridge) commended the plan to Synod and noted that the Net Zero plan as presented was one of the best environmental action plans he had seen within a church context. He was delighted that the diocese was now able to move from proof of concept to deployment with regards to their route to Net Zero and suggested that going forward, as a diocese, we must look to learn from work which had already been implemented so this learning could be utilised across the diocese.

By a show of hands, the Synod voted in favour of adopting the Net Zero Action Plan. Four members abstained from to voting.

The Chair thanked each speaker for their valuable contribution to this item and thanked Synod for their questions and comments.

#### **11. Deanery Planning**

*The Chair invited the Archdeacon of Lindisfarne to speak to this item.*

The Archdeacon thanked all Deanery Development Groups (DDG's) for all the hard work that had been put into their plans so far. The Archdeacon reported that herself and the Archdeacon of Northumberland, joined by the Director of Ordinands and Vocations, the Revd Stephen Tranter, and the Director of Mission and Ministry, the Revd Canon Dr Ric Whaite, had just completed a further successful round of DDG visits. The Archdeacon thanked both Directors for their extremely helpful input and insight throughout the visits.

The Archdeacon reported that all DDG's were working hard to reach a sustainable and achievable number of stipendiary clergy posts in their plans. At the autumn meeting of Synod members would be asked to engage in this issue with respect to deanery development plans (DDP's).

The Archdeacon informed members that the next Deanery Development Process was scheduled to take place on 1 June at Newcastle Cathedral. The Bishop of Newcastle would attend this meeting and would also be leading the Eucharist. The Archdeacon asked deaneries to contact their Area Dean if they had not yet received an invite and to submit the most recent version of their deanery development plans within the next two weeks.

#### **12. Racial Justice**

*The Chair invited the Bishop of Berwick to speak to this item.*

The Bishop delivered a brief update to inform members of the positive progress made so far in creating the Racial Justice Task Group. A good response had been received from those who had already been invited to be involved in the group. The Bishop confirmed that anyone hoping to join could still do so, but asked that they be put in touch with him directly to enquire.

The Bishop hoped to confirm the finalised Racial Justice Task Group at the September meeting of Synod.

*There were no questions or comments from members.*

#### **13. Any other business**

There was no other business

#### **14. Closing prayer and dismissal**

The Chair thanked the members of Synod for their positive contribution throughout the meeting and recorded his thanks to the Dean and Chapter for hosting the Synod at the Cathedral.

The Bishop thanked all in attendance for their support then led the Synod in prayer and with a blessing the meeting was drawn to a close.