

**Note of business transacted
at a meeting of the Newcastle Diocesan Synod
held on Saturday 8th March, 2025 at 10:00am at St Mary's Church, Claremont
Gardens, Whitley Bay NE26 3SF.**

The President was the Rt Revd Dr Helen-Ann Hartley, Bishop of Newcastle and the meeting was chaired by the Chair of the House of Clergy, the Revd Robert Lawrance; the Chair of the House of Laity, Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth and the Registrar, Laura Peace.

The Register, attached, recorded 73 members; 2 visitors and 8 officers in attendance.

1. Welcome and opening worship

The Bishop of Newcastle welcomed members to the meeting and gave a particular welcome to the New Director of Safeguarding, Sharon Devlin who would be speaking to Synod later in the meeting.

The Bishop then led the opening prayer for Synod.

The Revd Robert Lawrance took the chair

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from 20 members.

3. Declarations of Interest

No new declarations of interest were made.

4. Meeting held on Saturday 9th November, 2024

4.1. Note of business transacted on Saturday 9th November, 2024 (paper DS25 02)

The Synod noted and approved the business transacted.

4.2. Matters arising

The Chair invited the Diocesan Secretary to speak to the following matters arising:

i. Income Generation Group

The Secretary noted that at the last sitting of Synod the idea of setting up an Income Generation Group had been raised. The purpose of the Group would be to find ways of raising additional funds both at parish and diocesan level to try to close the funding gap/deficit in the budget. Subsequently, upon reflection it had been decided that three separate Group would be created and these were as follows:

- Reimagination Group

This group would look at new and innovative ways to organise worship and outreach. It would be made up of clergy and laity, both new and experienced and chaired by the Archdeacon of Northumberland. The first meeting was scheduled to take place on 31st March.

- Legacy Group

This group would look at imaginative ways to sustain and innovate mission and ministry in the diocese and how the Bishop Alec Graham Legacy may be used to support this. It would be made up of a subset of Bishop Council and chaired by the Bishop of Newcastle. The first meeting was scheduled to take place on 19th March.

- Income Generation Group

The group would explore innovative ways to help us generate new income streams with a challenge of generating an additional £1m per year for the foreseeable future. It would be made up of a number of North East based business leaders and entrepreneurs as well

as members and Attending Officers of the Bishop's Council, and chaired the Archdeacon of Lindisfarne. The first meeting was scheduled to take place on 3rd April.

ii. **Diocesan Secretary Recruitment** (addressed at item 8ii)

iii. **Net Zero Team Recruitment** (addressed at item 11.2)

iv. **Children and Youth Digital Media Guidance**

The Secretary informed members that the Children and Youth Digital Media Guidance had now been approved by Bishop's Council and was available on the diocese's website.

5. Notices

There were no notices.

6. Questions

The Secretary noted that the following questions had been received:

Q1) from the Revd Canon Ian Flintoft (Bedlington)

Given the expressed commitment of the Diocese to clergy wellbeing, and given the length of time at least one clergyperson has waited for a response to an initial request for counselling, what systems are in place to monitor the capability and effectiveness of the current counselling service?

In response, the Bishop of Berwick explained that the diocese employed an external consultancy to source and schedule all counselling and this service was offered to all clergy, clergy spouses, those in Reader ministry and all diocesan staff. The company provided us with six hours of consultancy per week and they aimed to respond to any requests for counselling within 48 hours of the initial enquiry.

The Bishop agreed that it was not good that this commitment had not been kept by the consultancy and apologized that the specific person raised within Revd Canon Flintoft's question had not received support in the time frame agreed. The Bishop noted that the current consultancy contract was looked after by himself and the Director of Mission and Ministry. This was a twelve-month contract and there was a monitoring of process in place which included monthly reporting provided by the consultancy as well as a monthly in-person review meeting. The Bishop confirmed that this issue would be reviewed with the consultants at the next review meeting.

Q2) from the Revd Canon Louise Taylor-Kenyon (Bamburgh and Glendale)

Following on from a vote on 22nd June 2023, the Deanery Synod of Bamburgh & Glendale believe that 4 FT Clergy is the correct number for effective mission and ministry in the Deanery. We have looked in depth at each possible configuration and have concluded it would be improper to recommend any 3.5 FT configurations to Parishes in this deanery. Therefore, we ask that Synod reviews the FT clergy allocation for the deanery as it is our belief that 4 FT Clergy is the only way forward.

In response, the Secretary explained that this question referred to clergy numbers and those numbers had been agreed by Synod in November as part of the 2025 Budget Consultation. As such, the Secretary noted that it would not be appropriate to have a discussion on this at Synod without first understanding the wider consequences of any proposed changes.

The Secretary confirmed that the next steps would be to refer this question to Bishop's Council so that the implications can be understood. This would likely also need to include a consultation with the Finance Group. Once Bishop's Council had discussed the question they would then make a recommendation on what was appropriate to bring to a subsequent Diocesan Synod for wider discussion. This process was to ensure that the Synod is furnished with the most relevant

information to enable the best possible debate. The Secretary highlighted that any changes to what was agreed by Synod in November had consequences for us all across the diocese.

To conclude the Secretary noted that they would also want to see lay and clergy numbers increase in leadership roles, and hopefully some of the items discussed at today's meeting would help to challenge the narrative of the past in respect to this.

7. Presidential Address

The Bishop of Newcastle gave their Presidential Address to Synod. A copy of the Address is attached to this note.

8. Board of Finance Items

The Chair invited the Head of Finance, Tom Royle to speak to the following Board of Finance items.

i. **2024 Year End Finance Report** (Paper DS25 03)

The Head of Finance (HoF) informed Synod that the paper accompanying this item was subject to change as the annual finance audit was currently still in process.

The HoF noted the following key points with regards to the 2024 Year End Finance Report:

- 2024 had seen savings and additional income which had mitigated some falls in income.
- Parish Share had come in £80k under budget. However, this was in line with previous years and we continued to hear of parishes struggling financially due to reliance on larger givers and dealing with unexpected and costly repairs to churches and church buildings.
- 2024 had seen an increase in housing income with rentals finishing £93k ahead of budget. Unfortunately, one of the reasons rental income had increased was because there was fewer clergy in place than planned and this meant there was a greater number of properties available to rent out.
- There had also been large savings across clergy stipend and pension with fewer clergy in place. 80FTE stipendiary clergy had been budgeted for, but with the way recruitment and the timings for appointments/retirements had worked out, the average was approximately 71FTE.
- There was also substantial pension savings of £161k made as the staff pension fund was in surplus and we were allowed to drawdown some of this surplus. Although this saving would continue into 2025 it was not seen to be a sustainable source of savings in the long term.
- Overall there was a deficit of around £420k which was far less than the £1.1m deficit forecast for 2024. However, as noted above, much of this saving was again down having fewer clergy and pension savings and these were not considered to be sustainable savings going forward.
- The £420k deficit had a negative impact on cash in a year when cash was stretched due to the purchase of two new properties. The NDBF was also currently looking to purchase a further property to make the diocese more attractive for recruitment.
- Some properties would eventually be sold and this would help to replenish cash. However, it was important that this was tightly managed to ensure cash reserve levels were maintained.
- The HoF reported a total returns approach was to be taken with the Bishop Alec Graham Legacy. This meant that the NDBF would be able to draw down some of the income from the fund without affecting the growth of the principle amount.
- A deficit of £910k was still expected for 2025.

The Chair invited questions or comments.

Carol Griffiths (Bamburgh & Glendale) asked if the HoF could provide further information with regards to the increase in rental income and whether the introduction of the Renter's Rights bill

would have an impact on rental income in the future. The HoF noted that in terms of rental income, this had increased simply because there had been more properties than expected which were available to rent. Some of this increase had come from continued rentals where clergy who that been expected to move in to a property, had not actually ended up moving in. The HoF confirmed they would look into the Renter's Rights act to be able to provide Synod with further information on this at the next meeting.

The Revd Steph Hunter (Bedlington) asked how many parishes were signed up to the Parish Giving Team. The HoF confirmed they would report back on this figure at the next sitting of Synod.

ii. **Recruitment for a New Diocesan Secretary**

The Chair reported that it had been agreed at the last meeting of Bishop's Council that Chris Elder would stay on as Diocesan Secretary for an initial period of 12 months. This would provide stability during a time of change and transition, particularly with the establishment of a new Safeguarding Team and Net Zero Team. The Chair noted that Chris had created continuity for the diocese and expressed his gratitude to Chris for all the work he had done thus far and for being able to stay on in post.

9. **General Synod Report** (Paper DS25 04)

The Chair invited General Synod Representative, Robin Brims to give a report from the February sitting of the General Synod (GS).

Robin Brims spoke to the paper which was written collaboratively by himself and General Synod Representatives, Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth, Nicola Denyer, Revd Canon Ian Flintoft, Revd Claire Robson and Revd Robert Lawrance.

The Chair invited questions or comments.

Dr John Appleby (Tynemouth) asked, given the way that amendments took up so much time during GS, was the Business Committee looking into ways this could be better managed. Canon Izzy McDonald Booth agreed that the time take for amendments stifled important debates on other matter and confirmed they would make representations to the Business Committee to address this issue.

The Revd Steph Hunter (Bedlington) remarked on the crude nature of the comment within the Finance section of the GS Report, "that it would be necessary to 'cut our cloth' in accordance with financial reality" given that the diocese had already recently agreed to cut clergy numbers and enquired where the comment had come from. Robin Brims noted that this had come from the central team leading on the review of the Church of England Finances who were commissioned to do so by the Archbishop's Council.

The Revd Brogan Hume (Newcastle Central) asked how, we as a diocese, would align ourselves with the vision to be younger and more diverse and how this would impact upon finances? Robin Brims explained that this would be one of the next steps at the National Level but could not confirm any further with regards to this issue at a local level.

The Revd Tom Birch (Corbridge) noted his disappointment that the motion brought by the Bishop of Bath and Wells about the redistribution of funds had not been discussed at GS due to time constraints. Revd Birch then asked whether it was correct there was a power struggle going on and that money controlled by the national church was not finding its way down to diocese because of decision making by those who were too high up in the system. Robin Brims agreed that this was the case and noted that the Bishop of Blackburn had reported a tug of war going on centrally.

The Revd Dr Hannah Cleugh (Tynemouth) noted that the impact of discussions around Vacancy in See at GS had received a lot of press but had not been mentioned in the report. Revd Cleugh wished to express concern to GS Representatives regarding the culture of General Synod and the wider church which put strain on our bishops and asked GS representatives to reflect on ways in which this may be resolved.

In response, the Revd Robert Lawrance noted that although the Church of England looked and functioned like a hierarchy, dioceses did have a lot of autonomy in their own functions. Revd Lawrance remarked that the organism of General Synod was not fit for purpose in modern secular society and explained that in one sense it would benefit from having a more corporate identity, however it would also have to have a different way of thinking on how power is managed and organised. The Revd Lawrance believed that there was an appetite for government reform on the matter and reported that the Bishop of London had recently written an article on how power was abused.

The Bishop of Newcastle thanked Revd Cleugh for their question and noted that General Synod's primary role was as a legislative body and this function should be brought back into focus. The Bishop added that General Synod should remember what its key calling was.

The Revd Anthony O'Grady (Morpeth) asked whether the potential to transfer clergy from Office Holders to employees (raised within a letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury) was on the radar of GS. Robin Brims responded to note that he did not think this was something GS was currently looking at.

The Revd Claire Robson noted that it was International Women's Day and as such asked Synod to pause and reflect on the injustice and inequality brought to women in the church. Revd Robson noted that there had been a lifetime of mistreatment to women in ministry. This issue had been raised by the Bishop of London herself during GS and the Bishop had broken down in tears when speaking to the continued micro-aggressions women in the Church of England still faced.

The Revd Steph Hunter (Bedlington) thanked the Revd Robson for raising this matter and noted that there had been a number of reports from women leaders within the church who had suffered misogyny and abuse which had gone unchecked. Revd Hunter urged that this needed to be addressed. Robin Brims thanked both Revd Robson and Revd Hunter and agreed wholeheartedly that problem needed to be tackled.

The Chair thanked GS representatives and members for their input and invited Synod to pause for a break.

The Synod paused for a break.

Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth took the chair

10. Mission and Ministry Update (Paper DS25 05)

The Chair invited the Bishop of Berwick to speak to this item on behalf of Director of Mission and Ministry (DMM), the Revd Canon Dr Ric Whaite.

The Bishop of Berwick explained that the DMM wasn't able to be at Synod as he was currently in attendance running the diocese's ALM training sessions. The Bishop noted that the update paper from the DMM was to be taken as read.

The Bishop informed members that as the DMM had now been in post for just over a year, both himself and the Revd Whaite believed Synod would appreciate understanding both the priorities of the first 12 months and our priorities moving forwards in the next year.

The bishop reported that amongst the everyday work, and the unexpected demands which had been many and various, there had been 3 clear priorities over the last 12 months which were as follows:

1. **Leading and supporting the Mission and Ministry (M&M) Team:** The bishop noted that before Revd Whaite joined us in March 2024, we had been without a DMM since July 2022 and consolidating the M&M team had been a very important task. For members who weren't aware of this team the bishop explained that those the DMM oversaw included our Youth & Children's Team, our Generous Giving Team, our Vocations team for lay and ordained ministry, our ministry development leads both in IME (curates) and ongoing formational development for clergy and lay ministers.
2. **Consolidating our ALM training and structures for those already active as ALMs:** The Bishop explained that this piece of work had gone through various different iterations and personnel changes which had been challenging for some who had offered for these ministries. However, the Bishop noted that we were now beginning to achieve the consistency of approach aimed for. The bishop reported there was have over 60 people engaged in this training across the diocese, online and in person and reflecting the whole range of our contexts. The Bishop noted that the M&M update paper gave a more detailed sense of the course itself which was particularly pivoted towards the Season of Seeking.
3. **Helping to support our diocesan engagement with our Year of Seeking:** The bishop noted that seeking postcards were shared across the diocese a few months ago inviting people to respond. The bishop expressed their gratitude for people's engagement in this exercise and informed members that so far over 100 responses had been received. The bishop reported that one of the things to come out of this was recognition of the very matter of fact nature of most of the responses. The bishop clarified that there was nothing wrong in this, but noted that more imaginative engagement may have been expected from some. Therefore, the M&M team's wondering was whether perhaps we needed to help each other nurture our imagination more prayerfully and theologically and from the great story of scripture.

The Bishop reported that over the next 12 months there was three other significant areas of mission and ministry that we would will engaging in and these were as follows:

1. **Seeking, Sharing and Sending:** Specifically enabling the transition from a Year of Seeking to a Year of Sharing. The bishop noted this would involve gathering what we had learned, seen, noticed, discovered and found, and understanding how this informs our moving forwards.
2. **Re-setting Vocations Work:** The Bishop explained that this Vocations work would be reset within our call as the whole church of God. The Bishop noted that the Church of England's vocation was and is to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ afresh in each generation to the people of England. This began with an understanding of what it means for us to become a church of missionary disciples and would enliven our work with discerning lay vocations to Reader/LLM ministry, authorised lay ministry and ordained ministry, but not just limited to that.
3. **Growing New Worshipping Communities (NWCs):** The Bishop clarified that one of the stated aims of the Church of England nationally for the future, was that any worshipping member of

the Church of England, when asked by their friend where they could go to explore their faith, would be able to recommend an expression of Church locally that would really suit them.

As a Synod we have given ourselves the aim of growing 150 new worshipping communities by 2032 when we mark our 150th anniversary as a diocese. The Bishop urged that this task was in part an acknowledgement of what we already saw happening (in Bubble Church, Brick Church, Afternoon Church, Messy Church, Refresh and many more) and a hope to be even more intentional.

The Bishop confirmed that a stream of missional accompaniment would put support alongside those clergy and lay teams who were looking to develop mission, and particularly NWCs and to help us learn from what we notice God doing in us and among us. The M7M team saw NCWs embracing, encouraging and stimulating our engagement in community mission and in our ministry to Estates.

The Chair thanked the Bishop of Berwick and invited questions and comments.

Susan Ramshaw (Bedlington) enquired upon the development of licensed lay ministry and the direction this might be headed and, particularly in light of the decreases in clergy, how reader ministry may better support clergy. The Bishop of Berwick emphasised the need to challenge the approach that was often held, that ministry was in place simply to support clergy, as this practice was missing something about what it meant to be people of God. The Bishop emphasised how extraordinary and valuable reader ministry was, but stressed that they were not here to specifically support clergy.

Carol Griffiths (Bamburgh & Glendale) noted her appreciation for the current Authorised Lay Ministry (ALM) course, of which she was a participant. Carol was impressed with both the administration of the course and the range of options offered to attend, as well as the content and commended the Mission and Ministry Team for this. With regards to the Season of Seeking prayer cards and circular prayer exercise, Carol was concerned about how far these had filtered down to parish level and asked if there was more that could be done to promote the Season of Seeking.

The Revd Tom Birch (Corbridge) emphasised how valued and indispensable lay ministry were to the diocese. Revd Birch noted that if we were to have authorised lay ministry, then it seemed that *unauthorized* lay ministry would also exist alongside this and this was causing distress at parish level. In light of this, Revd Birch asked for clarity with regards to who did the 'authorising' and if there were certain things that unauthorised ministry were not allowed to do. **The Revd Julia Lacey** (Morpeth) echoed Revd Birch's concerns and reported that there had been significant distress across the parishes she served from people who had been previously authorised who now felt that they were not recognised because of the new ALM.

In response, the Bishop of Berwick confirmed that they heard and understood these concerns. The Bishop explained that the ALM training was a national initiative which was endeavouring to put structures in place around what people wanted to do. The Bishop noted that in terms of authorisation, this came from the parishes themselves. With regards to Revd Lacey's concerns the Bishop noted that the core ALM course was to produce a standard of what ministry was about. The Bishop reassured Revd Lacey that himself and the other members of the Mission and Ministry Team would be happy to listen to and help with any complaints from her parish.

The Revd Steph Hunter (Bedlington) asked how did we recognise the work of those currently ministering and providing support across the diocese and if it would be possible to find a different term to replace 'authorised'. The Bishop confirmed these were two questions which were currently being looked at.

The Revd Captain Steve Dixon (Tynemouth) felt that as a dwindling church it was important to train people to do the difficult job of reaching out in mission and noted that it would take at least another two years to train people to do this. Therefore, the Revd Dixon asked if there was a way this training could be accelerated through the ALM programme. The Bishop agreed and noted that hopefully this training would be a part of growing new worshipping communities. The Bishop looked forward to bringing this training forward if capacity allowed.

In terms of the ALM training, **The Revd Chris Minchin** (Newcastle West) reported that for one person within their parish (Benwell & Scotswood), this was the third time they had been asked to do this type of training and another five people had done this twice. Revd Minchin noted that most of the people within the parish were from working class backgrounds and these people had felt overlooked by church culture for a long time. The introduction of the ALM training seemed to have created another barrier which suggested that the training which people had already completed was now a waste. Revd Minchin highlighted that those involved in the ALM from Benwell & Scotswood were enjoying the training but urged that it was important to be aware of the language we used and church culture as people were not always educated within the Church of England language. The Bishop noted that the Mission and Ministry team had commended Benwell and Scotswood engagement with the training, and were very much enjoying their work there. The Bishop appreciated that people may have felt that this was a repetition of training but noted that the ALM training was specific to the Year of Seeking and where the church was missionally at present. The Bishop acknowledged that consistency would need to be built on.

With regards to people's engagement with the exercises circulated as part of the Year of Seeking, **The Revd Julia Lacey** noted that it took a lot of space and a sense of safety for people to feel in place where they would be imaginative in their responses. Revd Lacey emphasised that this would be especially hard for those who were deeply traumatized and in poverty. Revd Lacey noted that she had come to her post within her parish as an academic and stranger and not having experienced this before, felt unequipped to deal with this. As such Revd Lacey noted that it would be good to have a trauma-based approach to this. The Bishop thanked Revd Lacey and confirmed that there was a challenge here for the Mission and Ministry team to address the best ways in which we can support parishes with respect to this and a challenge to us all as church to discern the best ways in which this support could be provided.

Mary Hipwell McIlroy (Alnwick) noted that, in terms of the Season of Seeking postcards, a lot of people had said they didn't understand the question they were being asked to respond to which may be the reason there hadn't been more imaginative responses sent in. The Bishop thanked everyone for their feedback noting that all feedback is good feedback. The Bishop noted that if people were struggling to answer how they were seeing God at work then this was something which needed to be addressed.

Dom Llewellyn (Newcastle Central) asked how New Worshipping Communities (NWCs) were defined. The Bishop informed members that a paper had been circulated during the previous triennium of Diocesan Synod which explained this precisely but ultimately, NWCs were new, they were worshipping and also communities. There was more work being done around precisely what this looked like and work would be done with parishes to understand exactly what an NWC was. The Bishop noted that Administration Officer, Candis Carr would be able to circulate the past paper on NWCs should members wish.

The Revd Brogan Hume (Newcastle Central) asked if there had been any thinking about the way Article 19 affects NWCs as Article 19 defined these in a specific way. The Bishop noted that the diocese was at the beginning of this work but confirmed that anything which came out of this would need to be consistent with the Articles of Faith.

11. Standing Agenda Items

11.1 Racial Justice

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

The Bishop of Berwick noted that the Racial Justice Report from General Synod had looked at how we make people feel at home in congregations which are not like us. General Synod had restated their commitment to this work and requested dioceses, deaneries and parishes to share in racial justice practices and responsibilities. With regards to our diocese the Bishop reported that work was being done to clarify the salary for the Racial Justice Officer role and confirmed that there was already funding in place to support a part-time post. The Bishop informed members that the diocese was also now looking to recruit a part-time Racial Justice *Development* Officer instead. The Bishop was in conversation with the National Racial Justice Unit for support with role descriptions to help more clearly identify and define the duties and responsibilities of the role. It was possible that the role could be increased to a full-time post in collaboration with a neighboring diocese. However, the Bishop believed that initially the post should be developed in-house as we were currently the only local diocese with a budget for this resource. It was hoped the recruitment process for the post would start over the next quarter of the year in order to give a more substantive update at the next sitting of Synod.

The Chair thanked the Bishop of Berwick and invited questions and comments.

The Revd Dr Hannah Cleugh (Tynemouth) asked if there was anything that we could do in the meantime to make things more diverse throughout the diocese. The Bishop of Berwick noted that there were things that could be done but unfortunately it was a question of capacity as there wasn't currently anyone available with the capacity to implement or lead these. The Bishop urged members to contact him if they knew of anyone who had the availability and capabilities to support the diocese with this work.

11.2 Net Zero Action Plan

The Chair invited the Secretary to speak to this item.

The Secretary reported that the diocese had now received a small amount of National Funding to help with Net Zero Quick Wins projects. This money would be administered through the Minor Repairs and Improvements Grants Panel led by Church Buildings Support Officer, Tim Lewthwaite.

The Secretary informed members that recruitment for the Net Zero Programme Manager had begun and interviews were scheduled for this post next month. There were still four other roles to recruit; a Fundraising Officer, a Project Manager, a Heating Adviser and an Administrator (all part-time roles). This process was overseen by a Net Zero Oversight Group whose members included the Acting Bishop's Advisor for the Environment; the Revd Tim Mayfield, Dr John Appleby and the Diocesan Secretary. The Group was chaired by the Revd Robert Lawrance. The Group was also looking to create an advisory panel to sit alongside the Oversight Group. This panel may be made up of those with a greater expertise in the field as well as younger voices and potentially someone from the farming community.

11.3 Safeguarding

i. Safeguarding Staffing

The Secretary spoke to this item and informed members that the current restructuring of the Safeguarding Team was in response to the Ineqe Safeguarding Audit. The new team would be comprised of the following four posts; a Safeguarding Trainer, a Safeguarding Caseworker, Safeguarding Administrator and Safeguarding Director.

The Secretary reported that Jill Thirlaway had been appointed as Safeguarding Caseworker and had joined us in post on 3rd March. Jill was already well known to many as she had worked for the diocese over the past 3 years as an external safeguarding casework consultant. Jill would be working alongside our existing caseworker, Lisa Wardlaw for the next two months which would help give extra capacity to the team during this transition.

John Hulse had been appointed as the new Safeguarding Training and Learning Advisor. John's start date was still to be confirmed but it was expected to be around 28th April.

The Secretary reported that it had not been possible to appoint a Safeguarding Administrator. However, the job advert had been re-advertised and there were strong applicants who would be coming in to interview for the post on 18th March.

The Secretary was also very pleased to announce that Sharon Devlin had been appointed as the new Safeguarding Director and that Sharon was in attendance today to speak to Synod. The Secretary noted that Sharon was scheduled to begin her role on 28th April.

ii. **Welcome and Introduction to New Safeguarding Director, Sharon Devlin**

The Secretary gave a warm welcome to the new Safeguarding Director, Sharon Devlin and invited her to address Synod.

The Safeguarding Director (SD) thanked members for the invitation to attend Synod and the opportunity to introduce herself to the diocese. The SD noted they currently worked for the NHS as a Lead Nurse for Safeguarding Children in County Durham and Darlington. The SD explained they had been with the NHS for 37 years and that their safeguarding history was made up a number of years as a nurse, a teacher and also a safeguarding professional.

The SD then went on to talk about their own personal experiences with safeguarding and the journey this had taken them on both personally and professionally. The SD also highlighted the importance of keeping safeguarding relatable without making it overwhelming and discussed ways in which this may be done.

The Chair thanked the Safeguarding Director and invited questions and comments.

Aidan Evans (Newcastle West) welcomed the new Safeguarding Director and noted that there was much to be done to maintain vigilance around safeguarding. Aidan noted that for him personally during his youth the church had been a safe space and throughout all the activities he had been a part of he had been led by people of impeccable honour and integrity. Aidan said this to honour these memories and to note that there was good practice on which we could build.

The SD noted that it was important to acknowledge that we came from a background with a wealth of experience. The SD knew from survivors that perpetrators were known to seek out vulnerable places and people. Therefore, safeguarding work had to be proactive and not reactive so that we would not be deemed as an attractive space to these perpetrators.

Emma Doran (Tynemouth) noted that we must remember that we have got safeguarding wrong in places and therefore we must challenge ourselves and not just presume we have got this right. **Andrew Wheatley** (Bishop's Nominee to Diocesan Synod) agreed and reflected that the two biggest issues the diocese needed to get across was culture, not compliance and also emphasising that safeguarding should not be about 'what if I'm wrong', but 'what if I'm right'. **Revd Canon David Glover** (Hexham) noted that safeguarding was everyone's responsibility. Revd Glover explained that within his deanery, seeing safeguarding as a way parishes could

flourish had been a massive shift for all involved. Safeguarding was now seen to be fundamental in everything they did across the deanery, and as Andrew had stated, this was not about compliance but a change in the culture of safeguarding as a whole.

Dr John Appleby (Tynemouth) welcomed the SD's message that it was important to better manage risk and responsiveness. In terms of perpetrators Dr Appleby noted that it was not as simplistic as there being good and bad people, there was a spectrum and there were people who were also opportunistic. Dr Appleby observed that there was also a spectrum of experience and perpetration and felt that it was important that people did not become paranoid because of safeguarding. The SD agreed noting that there was not always a clear line between safeguarding versus clergy discipline measures and at what point one became the other. The SD clarified that safeguarding could be seen as a protection from something that causes physical, emotional or sexual harm as well as neglect. While the SD understood where Dr Appleby was coming from, they highlighted that safeguarding had been minimized and this could not happen going forward. The SD urged that safeguarding must be brought to the forefront of our practices and responsibilities. The SD noted that some behaviors are entrenched within organisations and accepted as 'this is how we work' and this kind of thinking or behavior was no longer acceptable in church or society as a whole. The SD acknowledged that each case should be taken individually but these behaviors must be challenged.

The Revd Chris Minchin (Newcastle West) welcomed the SD and had a particular request around Safer Recruitment. Revd Minchin reported that there had been struggles within their parish recruiting refugees. In one case, because someone had been involved with social services, the whole process was abusive towards this person and traumatic. The SD noted that Safer Recruitment was key and the cornerstone of what safeguarding was trying to achieve, however, each case needed to be looked at individually and societal acceptances challenged in order that the process worked correctly and fairly.

The Revd James Bartle (Bedlington) thanked the SD for their address and asked, when looking at legislation and process within safeguarding we also talk about the gospel. Revd Bartle noted how safeguarding was done should first come from the gospel. The SD thanked the Revd Bartle for raising this important point.

Revd Canon Dr Sarah Hills (Norham) welcomed the SD and noted that in the SD's response to Dr Appleby they hadn't mentioned spiritual abuse and the improper use of power as forms of abuse and these were issues which were still impacting the church. The SD apologized for this omission and noted that both these things would be seen under the umbrella of emotional abuse. The SD noted that coming from the health sector, things such as this would be an area of learning for them and asked for the support of everyone within the diocese to help them to see the world of safeguarding through their eyes. The SD emphasised that safeguarding as a whole is always about learning and sharing.

iii. Chaplaincy to Survivors Update

The Chair invited the Archdeacon of Northumberland to speak to this item on behalf of the Chaplaincy to Survivors, Maggi Creese.

The Archdeacon of Northumberland informed members that Maggi was not able to be at Synod as she was currently facilitating a peer meeting for survivors at Church House. The archdeacon then reported the following updates:

- **Jagged Edges** - A new Stations of the Cross art piece created with support from the Chaplaincy by three survivors, Sarah Troughton, David Creese and Peter Locke, would be on display at Shieldfield Art Works in Newcastle from the 9th to the 26th of

April. There were flyers advertising the exhibition at the back of the church for members to take away and help spread the word about this.

- **Peer Support Group** – There were also peer support group posters and flyers for Synod to take away. The information on these had been updated recently. Therefore, the archdeacon encouraged members take these and distribute them if they could.
- **Conference at Newcastle Cathedral** – A conference would be held at the Cathedral on 13th May titled: *Why is the Church Hurting? Exploring Moral Injury in the Church*. Please follow the link below for further information on this event.

['Why is the Church Hurting?' - Moral Injury Conference 2025 at Newcastle Cathedral event tickets from TicketSource](#)

The Archdeacon noted that Maggi had one further request for Synod and this was for members' prayers. The archdeacon explained that people around the diocese may or may not have been aware, but events in the Church of England since the publication of the Makin Review last year were having a significant impact on survivors everywhere, including in Newcastle. Even if they had no direct connection to the cases being discussed in the media, many would see things in these stories that resonated with their own experiences of abuse, and that could activate the trauma they carry with them or even traumatised them all over again. Many were suffering and there had been a surge in referrals to the Chaplaincy, particularly in the category of self-referrals, and Maggi was struggling to keep up. The Archdeacon noted that Maggi asked members to please pray for our Church and its leaders, that they might find the courage to be sorry and not just say sorry, for those who have been harmed in and by our Church and for Maggi herself and for the work of the Chaplaincy.

12. Deanery Planning

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

The Archdeacon of Lindisfarne noted that the Deanery Development Process had become a really important part of life for the diocese. The archdeacon emphasised how grateful they were to all the Deanery Development Groups (DDGs) that were working so hard towards the mission of Seeking, Sharing and Sending and looking at new ways in which we could maximise our resources to serve our communities.

The archdeacon reported that the most recent meeting of DDGs at St Aidan's in Morpeth on 15th February had been a great success. The Generous Giving Team had attended to speak to DDGs and there had been a central focus around new worshipping communities. The archdeacon urged parishes to contact the generous Giving Team for information on their Pathways to Generosity toolkit if they hadn't already done so.

In relation to Synod's earlier discussion on New Worshipping Communities (NWCs) the archdeacon noted that NWCs were defined as:

- **New** - The aim of a newly created worshipping community is to reach people who are currently not attending church (in the previous 2 years) and to make new Christian disciples.
- **Worshipping** - The purpose of the community is to worship Jesus Christ and to help people grow in their faith. Its practices would involve initially two or more of the following; prayer, scripture, praise, sacrament, and acts of service.
- **Community** - Meets together in person or online regularly (ie at least once a month), is connected with the wider Church through the parish church, deanery or diocese.'

These communities were being set up to help reach people who were not currently attending church. To clarify, the archdeacon noted that coffee mornings and choir groups would not come under the category of a NWC, however, this initiative was also not the same as church planting.

Therefore, the community would need to be new, but it didn't have to offer the sacrament at every meeting.

13. Any other business

The Secretary confirmed there was no other business.

14. Close

The Bishop of Newcastle thanked all in attendance for their engagement as well as Church House staff, Ruth O'Hagan, Kyrinn Gill and Candis Carr for their support in organising the Synod and St Mary's church for their hospitality. The Bishop then led the Synod in prayer and with a blessing drew the meeting to a close.