

Report on the Guildford Diocesan Synod

16 June 2012

Diocesan Budget

The Diocesan Synod approved the draft 2013 Diocesan budget for the next stage and will consider the final version in November. It proposes a 2.5% increase in diocesan expenditure for 2013, which includes a 2.5% increase in clergy stipends from April 2013.

Membership of Diocesan Synod

The Synod voted against a proposal to submit a Diocesan Synod Motion to the General Synod asking for an amendment to the Church Representation Rules which would Dioceses to change how people are elected to Diocesan Synods. The voting was 19 in favour and 20 against.

I voted against, in accord with my election promise to seek to reduce the amount of time, and therefore expense, at General Synod debating motions that are not essential. In my view a problem of insufficient communication between the Diocesan Synod and parishes could be addressed more simply by working to increase communication, rather than by changing the process of election.

Questions

I submitted the following question to the Diocesan Synod meeting:

Question regarding Bishop's Council minutes 13.03.12 Stipend Increase

Paragraph 23/12 of the minutes of the Bishop's Council 13th March 2012 records the decision not to reconnect to National stipends guidelines.

At the Diocesan Synod meeting of 12 March 2011, I submitted the question:
"[...] What representations do the Bishops' Council, or other appropriate Diocesan body, intend to make to the Central Stipends Authority to seek to persuade the CSA that the regional stipend benchmark figure for Guildford should be increased, so that in future years the Diocese of Guildford will no longer be in breach of national Church guidelines?"

To which the Diocesan Secretary replied:
"[...] the RSB was seen to be producing strange results and had appeared to have recently been revised - the Council asked that the RSB be discussed with the National Church"

Following the Bishop's Council's 2011 decision to discuss with the National Church the regional stipend benchmark, what discussions subsequently took place and what was the outcome of those discussions?

I received the following reply:

Nigel Lewis, the Chairman of the DBF, has had discussions with staff at Church House and learnt more about the RSB. Nigel has drafted a report on stipends, which notes among other things that the RSB structure does not seem to produce sensible results.

This report has been sent to all stipendiary clergy, by Nick Whitehead, the Chairman of the House of Clergy, and report on the consultation from Nick will be discussed by Bishop's Council. In consideration of the Guildford Stipend's Policy is active work in progress. (The legal position is that the stipend level is a matter for the Bishop after consultation.)

At the meeting I asked the following supplementary question:

The answer in 2011 said that the national guidelines - the Regional Stipends Benchmark - produces "strange results". The answer today says that our further discussions with Church House has confirmed our view that the national formula does not produce "sensible results". Can we offer to the national Church revisions to their formula, so that in future it will produce sensible results?

The Diocesan Secretary replied that it was difficult to come up with a better formula ourselves, though we can press the national Church to come up with one. We need to find a way to factor in cost of living in addition to income figures which are already taken into account. If anyone has ideas for this he would like to hear them.

The reason why I asked the question is that the Guildford Diocese for years has departed from the national stipends guidelines in what it pays clergy. Our justification has been that the recommended figure is not reliable. We seem to have been satisfied with that, rather than take the trouble to engage with the national Church to improve the formula. My motivation has not been that I think the Guildford Diocese pays clergy too much (though I am a little concerned that our paying more than any other diocese could mean that poorer dioceses are deprived by us of their fair share of clergy because we take more than our fair share by paying more). We should try and work with the national Church and all dioceses. So, if we think stipends are too low, we should lobby to increase them in all dioceses, rather than simply go it alone.