

# **Report of the Bishop's Advisory Group on the Appointment to the See of Ramsbury**

## **1. Introduction**

The Bishop's Advisory Group was established by the Bishop's Council with the following members :

Chair: The Dean, the Very Reverend June Osborne  
Secretary: The Diocesan Secretary, Mrs Lucinda Herklots  
Members: The Bishop of Sherborne, Dr Graham Kings  
The Archdeacon of Dorset, the Ven Stephen Waine  
(succeeding the Archdeacon of Wilts the Ven John Wraw)  
The Chair of the House of Laity, Mr Robert Key  
The Chair of the House of Clergy, Canon Paul Richardson (resigned  
due to unrelated reasons in September)  
The Lay Chairman of Dorchester Deanery, Mr Roger Holehouse  
The Priest-in-Charge of Bradford-on-Avon, Holy Trinity, the Revd Joanna Abecassis

Minuting Secretary: The Bishop's Chaplain, the Revd Jonathan Ball

## **Terms of Reference**

- To provide the Diocesan Bishop with a recommendation of whether to appoint a suffragan colleague to the See of Ramsbury.
- To consider what it means to have three bishops resident in Wiltshire (Salisbury, Ramsbury and Swindon in the Diocese of Bristol), and how a Bishop of Ramsbury would be "a bishop in Wiltshire".
- To clarify Episcopal ways of working in the Diocese following the dismantling of the Episcopal Area Scheme and implications for Archidiaconal ways of working.
- To reflect on the current and potential patterns of working between bishops and archdeacons in order to inform future deployment, staffing levels and effective operating.

## **Process Goals**

- To provide the Bishop with the necessary consensus to move ahead with reshaping Episcopal and archidiaconal ministry.
- To fulfil the requirements of the national process prior to the appointment of suffragan bishops as agreed by the House of Bishops.
- To give both the diocesan and civic communities full opportunity to express hopes with respect to the future of Episcopal ministry.
- To stimulate a fresh awareness amongst the Bishop's Staff and Bishop's Council concerning the leadership roles within the diocese in the light of a new Episcopal team.

## **2 The Consultees**

The Advisory Group decided to approach a wide cross-section of people within and outside the Diocesan community:

- Diocesan community: through a series of 5 group consultations held across the Diocese (3 in Wiltshire, 2 in Dorset) which attracted only 65; and through individual letters to 166 clergy, 392

church wardens, 83 Diocesan Synod members and 277 Diocesan school heads and Chairs of governors; totalling 918.

- Wider community: individual letters to 72 members of the wider Wiltshire community; with an accompanying facts sheet and a Powerpoint presentation outlining the work of the Diocese, explaining the work of bishops and archdeacons, and the particular issues for this Diocese.
- Visits to 5 schools: a Special School, a County Primary School, a County Comprehensive, a Voluntary Controlled Primary School, an Academy Comprehensive. These visits included interviews with Heads and deputy Heads, and time spent with pupils, in particular 6<sup>th</sup> formers.

### **3 The Consultation Questions**

**Internal Consultees** were asked to respond to the following questions:

- What difference does having a bishop make to you, and to local and national life?
- What difference does having an archdeacon make to you, and to local and national life?
- What would you want them to prioritize?
- How do you think bishops and archdeacons might best work in the Diocese following the dismantling of the Episcopal Area Scheme?
- Should a bishop of Ramsbury be appointed?
- If the Church of England decided in the next 5 years that dioceses ought to pay for their suffragan bishops, would this affect your decision?
- Do you have any other comments?

**External Consultees** were asked to respond to the following questions:

- How do you encounter bishops and archdeacons?
- In what way does a bishop add to the life of Wiltshire and Dorset, and to your sphere?
- In what way does an archdeacon add to the life of Wiltshire and Dorset, and to your sphere?
- What more might you want from them?
- Should a Bishop of Ramsbury be appointed?
- Do you have any other comments?

### **4 Internal Responses**

4.1 Correspondence was received from:

- 22 diocesan clergy and the Calne Deanery Chapter
- 47 Laity
- 11 PCCs
- 16 Head teachers and 2 Chair of Governors
- 18 representatives of other organisations
- The Registrar

Responses were also sought at a joint meeting of the Bishop's Council and Diocesan Board of Education, from a meeting of the Rural Deans, and from the 5 open Diocesan consultation sessions. A number of conversations were also held with head teachers and year 12 and 13 young people and one primary school sent in their thoughts.

4.2 **Responses:**

#### **4.2.1 What difference does having a bishop make to you, and to local and national life?**

The Consultation meetings put particular emphasis on the role of bishops in the pastoral care of clergy, and their responsibility to inspire clergy, and to be strategic decisionmakers for the Diocese. Sadly a significant number of the written responses from laity and head teachers commented that there was little contact with

bishops or archdeacons; and some went further in saying they felt isolated and without support; and yet this was the principal purpose of senior clergy.

They are seen as figure heads and role models providing a focus of unity, but also a focal point for accountability to the rest of the Church of England and the wider Church.

There was a universal recognition that they have a role in the wider life of the nation, and that the political influence of the Church can be exercised through them, particularly through bishops being a focal point for the media. They represent the public face of the Church to the wider community, and as such encourage individuals and congregations to engage with the non-church community.

Affirmation and challenge of local congregations was identified frequently as important.

Suffragans were seen as potentially bringing special expertise and being more available than diocesans.

#### **4.2.2 What difference does having an archdeacon make to you, and to local and national life?**

Archdeacons were seen in the Consultation meetings as being practical sources of support and advice both to clergy and wardens especially during vacancies, and also as conflict resolvers. Their accessibility was praised by some, though others saw them as being too busy in meetings.

Some saw them as change enablers who could ask difficult questions.

#### **4.2.3 What would you want them to prioritize?**

Clear priorities were identified for bishops and archdeacons in leading mission and in linking and networking with non-Church communities. Many wanted them to be more visible in local communities rather than in meetings in Salisbury; they needed to be clear communicators.

The written responses from clergy and laity emphasised the need for bishops and archdeacons to concentrate on support and pastoral care for laity and clergy, and to be more visible and accessible.

A measured and full response from the Diocesan Registrar expressed concern at the increasing demands made on bishops and archdeacons by statutory requirements both in the area of supporting clergy through changed terms of service, and from national government, and urged that solutions be found to free both to focus on what he saw as their primary ministries – the bishops in leading mission, and the archdeacons in supporting clergy and parishes. His worry was that reducing numbers of the senior clergy might squeeze out this primary ministry in favour of administration.

Head teachers called for a number of significant priorities:

- Real commitment to spiritual leadership of and ministry to students since they constitute the greatest number of regular worshippers in the Diocese.
- More direct engagement with pupils.
- More advocacy on behalf of children and young people.
- More visibility in support for head teachers and staff.

#### **4.2.4 How do you think bishops and archdeacons might best work in the Diocese following the dismantling of the Episcopal Area Scheme?**

Many felt that whilst flexibility was needed so that skills could be shared for the benefit of the whole Diocese, archdeacons should be rooted in specific geographical areas to enable their local knowledge and rootedness.

It was felt by a significant number that archdeacons are doing too many things that need not be done by an archdeacon; and indeed could be done (as could some bishops' tasks) by lay people.

It was clear from the responses that there is a lack of clarity even amongst some clergy about the difference in role between bishop and archdeacon. Some felt that any change in ways of working between bishops and archdeacons should be left until Bishop Nicholas has settled into ministry and is able to make an informed opinion for himself about current practice and future possibilities.

#### **4.2.5 Should a new Bishop of Ramsbury be appointed?**

Responses to this question in the Consultations were mixed in detail, but overall there was a clear desire to appoint another Bishop of Ramsbury, and that he should live north of Salisbury Plain, due both to the size of the Diocese and the desire to have more visible and accessible bishops. This was echoed – though not so strongly - in responses from PCCs and from individual lay people. Only a few responses very strongly endorsed the filling of both posts.

A small number of respondents expressed concern that Dorset needed an episcopal presence and that if the Bishop of Sherborne were to become Salisbury's deputy and was often in Wiltshire, this would reduce his visibility and accessibility in Dorset.

Of those who expressed a view (84) the majority was 3:1 in favour of appointing to the See of Ramsbury.

It was equally clear that there is a desire on the part of most lay respondents and a significant number of the clergy respondents to reduce senior posts in the Diocese as it currently is, in line with reductions of numbers of parish clergy and due to rising costs and parish share. In the written responses, 10 from laity and 6 from clergy all pointed to the apparent incongruence of increase in the number of bishops and archdeacons at a time of decreasing congregations; many used the phrase 'top heavy' of the clerical structure of dioceses, and 3 written responses argue for neither post in Wiltshire to be filled.

At the consultations, most believed an archdeacon's post should be discontinued, recognising that not all 4 archdeacons work wholly on archidiaconal tasks. Some (at 3 consultations, in 5 lay written responses and in the Rural Dean of Marlborough's on behalf of St Mary's Marlborough PCC) suggested combining the Bishop of Ramsbury post with that of the Archdeacon of Sarum along the lines of the Ludlow model. Others felt this created an undesirable ambiguity between the roles of bishop and archdeacon, but others argued otherwise:

'I do understand that traditionally the roles of Bishop and Archdeacon have been very distinct, but it seemed to me that John Wraw added a pastoral oversight to his administrative and practical tasks. More to the point, there were occasions, noticeably in the appointments process, when there appeared to be unnecessary duplication. If the Archdeacon has been involved with a benefice during the vacancy, the arrival of the Bishop solely on the day of the interviews seems to me to be superfluous and undermining of the Archdeacon's position...Quite apart from any financial considerations, combining the two roles should bring the Bishop closer to the clergy because they will be working together in a way that doesn't happen at present. In Wilts Archdeaconry I have always felt that it is the Archdeacon who has been a 'Partner in Mission' rather than the Bishop who is that bit further removed.'

3 lay responses suggested suggested petitioning for Swindon and the remainder of North Wilts to be incorporated into the Diocese as a way of justifying the 3 bishops, 4 archdeacons pattern (though this would necessarily mean the discontinuation of either the See of Ramsbury or Swindon never mind the Diocese of Bristol!); whilst one clerical response suggested re-appointing the Archdeacon of Wilts but sharing the Bishop of Swindon with Bristol.

The Principal of Sarum College suggested merging the roles of suffragan bishop with those of the 4 archdeacons and have 4 bishops - Wilts, Sarum, Sherborne and Dorset, describing the benefit of such a move being:

- saving the ‘I will have to ask the bishop/archdeacon before I can give you a decision’ scenario, and delivering smarter working;
- creating a smaller and more coherent senior staff team;
- bringing bishops closer to the people;
- saving two posts;
- ending the myth of bishop = good cop and archdeacon = bad cop.

He added that the more bishops we have and the more we see them the less likely we all are to project into them unrealistic fantasies.

The Rural Dean of Weymouth and Portland, Ian Hobbs, suggested 3 different models of how less senior clergy might be deployed across the Diocese (3 bishops and 3 archdeacons, 2 bishops and 4 archdeacons, or 2 bishops and 3 archdeacons).

2 written responses from 3 clergy, including Canons Jane and Nigel Lloyd, counselled the Bishop to hesitate before making an appointment to either the See of Ramsbury or Archdeaconry of Wilts for a year to 18 months, in order that he could be clearer about his intended strategy for the Diocese. This was also the advice of the Bishop of Swindon, Dr Lee Rayfield, whose contribution is included here rather than in those of external respondees because of its direct relevance:

‘Strategic thinking and planning, while not so obvious, are dimensions which characterize the activities of many individuals and communities - including I would argue Jesus himself.

In the light of this it seems to me that the appointment of a new bishop or archdeacon would be best done in relation to your overall vision and strategy for the diocese. There is no mention of this in the paperwork. If there is not yet any clarity about vision or strategy my view is that it would be wise to delay making a decision until there is.

Alternatively, the appointment of a bishop should be moved forward with the intention of appointing someone who, together with other senior colleagues and especially the new Diocesan bishop, could lead in this process and help set a fresh direction and tone. An archdeacon with appropriate gifting could well do this but in my view this is a gifting that should be a characteristic of Episcopal ministry.’

Head teachers and Chairs of Governors were less clear since they have had less contact with the ministry of bishops and even less with archdeacons, though some spoke very highly of support they had received and of interactions between senior clergy and their pupils. Of the 16 responses, the greatest number (7) felt unable to make a recommendation as to whether the See should be filled, whilst only 3 clearly recommended it (2 being boarding schools which host confirmation services).

#### **4.2.6 If the Church of England decided in the next 5 years that dioceses ought to pay for their suffragan bishops, would this affect your decision?**

There were mixed responses to this question at the Consultations: most suggested that they would be content to pay in principle if the bishop delivered what was expected, showing value for money; although it was suggested that even a 2% rise in share would be unaffordable for some parishes.

## **5 External Responses**

**5.1** Letters indicating more than acknowledgement were received from:

- The Lord Lieutenants of Wiltshire and Dorset, and a former Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire
- 3 ecumenical partners (Methodists, Quakers, and the Salvation Army)
- The Bishops of Bristol and Swindon, and the Principal of Sarum College
- The Chief Executives of Wiltshire Community Foundation and the Wiltshire Probation Trust.

- The church Relations Manager of Christian Aid and a representative of the HQ43 Brigade of the Army
- Andrew Murrison MP, the Leader of Wiltshire Council and the Mayor of Trowbridge
- The Chair of Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust, the Deputy Chief Constable of Wiltshire
- The Managing Director of Spire FM and the Chair of Governors of Marlborough College.

Though not all approached felt able to contribute to the consultation, most were pleased to have been included. But those who did respond, with exceptions, struggled to answer the questions fully, principally because they did not really understand what a suffragan bishop or archdeacon are for.

## **5.2 Responses**

### **5.2.1 How do you encounter bishops and archdeacons?**

There was little evidence offered of contact with bishops and archdeacons. Of the ecumenical and voluntary sector partners who wrote, the URC Moderator had met the Bishop of Ramsbury at Wiltshire Church Leaders' meetings, and both the Chief Executive of Wiltshire Community Foundation and the Leader of Wiltshire Council had appreciated the Archdeacon of Wilts' chairing of the Wiltshire Assembly.

### **5.2.2 In what way does a bishop add to the life of Wiltshire and Dorset, and to your sphere?**

From the Christian community the URC Moderator remarked that churches must speak together as far as possible and was thankful for Bishop Stephen Conway's support for shared concerns within Wiltshire.

From the wider community the Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire commented that bishops carry an authority and weight of wisdom simply by being bishops; and their presence in a parish church, school, meeting of the community or in the county raises expectations that cannot be duplicated by archdeacons.

The Managing Director of Spire FM saw a suffragan bishop as a 'strong presence who knows their patch' who can 'open things (archdeacons are nice but not the same)'. His comments were echoed by the Chair of Salisbury NHS Trust who commented that in the eyes and perception of the local community there is considerable difference between a bishop and an archdeacon, with the latter being more inward focussed on internal structures and organisation for the delivery of the Church's mission.

The leader of Wiltshire Council, Jane Scott, spoke warmly of regular meetings with Bishop Stephen Conway and Archdeacon John Wraw to share future planning and challenges, and to hear their comments. Sadly the Mayor of Trowbridge was the only other civic leader who responded: he had had no experience of encounter with bishops or archdeacons and so felt they did not add value in any way.

### **5.2.3 In what way does an archdeacon add to the life of Wiltshire and Dorset, and to your sphere?**

The Principal of Sarum College argued that it is very difficult to distinguish the roles of bishops and archdeacons in terms of actual presence and function, though a couple of other responses saw archdeacons as operations managers ensuring the delivery of the product.

Jane Scott, the leader of Wiltshire Council pointed to the 'superb chairmanship' of the Wiltshire assembly by Archdeacon John Wraw, and in particular his skill at drawing together local government, business and voluntary sector for the good of all; she commends this as demonstrating not only the importance of the Church's place in society but showing how Christian values can be 'at the heart of decision-making in our forward thinking and planning.'

#### **5.2.4 What more might you want from them?**

The most common response to this question was 'more visibility' /presence especially in places which would spawn the greatest effect. The Deputy Chief Constable in particular said that more involvement in some of the social difficulties and issues that are encountered alongside more integrated and cohesive work with community partners, and this was echoed by Lord Sharman, a Lay Canon of the Cathedral and chairman of Aviva, who feels the Church is in danger of becoming isolated without engagement in societal problems.

The response from the Church Relations Manager of Christian Aid understandably called for bishops to take the lead in encouraging action on behalf of those who are the poorest and most vulnerable in the world, which includes willingness to engage in talks at an ecumenical level, and also to engage fully with the inter-faith dialogue.

#### **5.2.5 Should a Bishop of Ramsbury be appointed?**

Responses were mixed, and were clearly dependent on previous experience; there was no overwhelming affirmation for a reappointment except from Cllr Jane Scott who would wish both vacancies to be filled; though the support of both Lord Lieutenants (and a former Ld Lt) who have the wider view of life in the counties is significant.

The URC Moderator argued that Church of England bishops have the highest public profile of local Church leaders to whom the press will turn to for statements, and therefore can speak not just for the Church of England but for all the main denominations as a bridge between Church and secular authorities.

The Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire felt that a Bishop of Ramsbury should be appointed due to the size of the Diocese, but also because of the potential future national and international roles of Bishop Nicholas; whilst the Chair of Salisbury NHS Trust believes that the appointment is necessary for more effective mission.

The Chair of Governors of Marlborough College urged the appointment of a new Bishop of Ramsbury, despite the pressure on costs and a declining number of clergy over time, in order to share the leadership load across the two counties of the Diocese, adding that it was his experience that it can be a great mistake, in straitened times, to slice away at the top structure of an organisation, especially when it is already small.

This contrasted with the views of the only MP who responded, Andrew Murrison, who commented that the Diocese is 'top-heavy' and that we should follow the example in other public fields where other hierarchies have been thinned. There was also a suggestion from the Wiltshire Community Foundation that the post might be gapped for 18 months to assess whether it could be done without, whilst the Lord Lieutenant of Dorset suggested that a Bishop of Ramsbury should be appointed, but there should be thinning of other Diocesan officer posts.

#### **5.2.6 Do you have any other comments?**

The Managing Director of Spire FM stressed that any new appointee should continue to have specialist responsibilities which match their skills and interests, and complement those of other Diocesan leaders.

The Mayor of Trowbridge pointed out that Ramsbury is an obscure little-known village on the edge of the county and that if a new bishop were appointed, he should bear the name of the county town.

### **6 Conclusion on the Consultation**

This has been an extensive and thorough consultation producing some thoughtful and insightful responses from 5 open meetings, 2 diocesan meetings, 7 schools' meetings and 108 written replies representing

Parochial Church Councils and individuals from all walks of life. We wish to thank everyone who has participated and we believe that their investment has provided us with a strong basis upon which to make our recommendations. However, it needs to be recognised that the feedback we received is not a comprehensive or reliable sample. For instance we were sorry to receive responses from only 19 of the 166 diocesan clergy who were contacted.

In summary there is a desire on the part of the majority of those who expressed a view to replace the Bishop of Ramsbury, whilst there is a slight majority in favour of shedding an archdeacon's post.

## **7 Observations from the Bishop's Advisory Group**

Themes identified from consultation were:

- The importance of the visibility and presence of bishops for the local church but especially in the 'public square'.
- The desire for clarity about the roles and responsibilities of bishops and archdeacons, and a suggestion that the roles might be combined.
- Whether diminishing stipendiary numbers of clergy automatically dictates a need to shrink the hierarchy.
- The expressed desire to reduce perceived diocesan bureaucracy and duplication notwithstanding the reduction of posts.
- The need for a clear strategy and measurable objectives for the Diocese, and the issue of whether (and how) bishops and archdeacons are delivery agents of that strategy.

### **7.1 Visibility/Presence**

- The perception that bishops and archdeacons are not sufficiently visible or available within the Diocese is both open to challenge and in conflict with a desire to reduce senior staff numbers.
- The desire for greater visibility, of bishops in particular, in the context of civic life is an opportunity which the church should not neglect. Whilst the presence of church leaders to mark civic occasions is valued the point was well made by community leaders that they should be at the table in order to exert real influence and build stronger communities and not just for window-dressing. They have the capacity to create space for people to meet and do business together to good effect.
- The importance of mission to young people in schools was also seen as an invaluable role that bishops can fulfill.
- Personality was seen as significant in making that kind of transforming impact, since the right to be respected has to now be earned by the Church.

### **7.2 Conflation of the roles of bishop and archdeacon**

- Combining the two roles would exacerbate existing confusion concerning the distinctive ministries of bishops and archdeacons.
- Whilst the concept of 'shared episcopate' across the diocese has brought a greater sense of participation in the Bishop's ministry it may have led to some misunderstanding of the difference of roles between bishops and archdeacons.

### **7.3 Reductions in posts**

- The Group was clear that the decision to appoint a new bishop should not be dictated by finance and that the most important considerations were to do with ministry and mission.
- If there were to be a reduction to 3 archdeacons, this would redefine the current relationship of the archdeacons to the suffragan/s and to the Bishop, since it would be most likely that any re-drawn archdeaconry boundaries would cross the county boundaries.
- A reduction may mean assessing the role descriptions of the archdeacons especially in the light of new clergy terms of service, in particular whether one archdeacon can represent all, and whether other laity or clergy could take over some archidiaconal responsibilities. Such an assessment might inform a decision about whether there should be a reduction.
- The archdeacons are confident that a re-distribution of deaneries furnishing 3 workable archdeaconries within the Diocese, each with similar numbers of parishes and licensed clergy is possible.

- A reduction would necessitate a review of resourcing and administrative support for the work of the suffragan/s and archdeacons.
- Such a reduction might be linked to a petition to the Dioceses Commission to review the northern boundary of the Diocese, raising the possibility that Swindon and North Wiltshire become part of this Diocese.

#### **7.4 The appointment of a Bishop of Ramsbury**

- It seemed clear from the consultation that bishops were more easily able to make an impact and open doors in the wider world than archdeacons. In addition we found persuasive the arguments made by the Registrar, that the demands on the senior staff of a diocese through new legislation and complex processes were considerable and obligatory, and by the Chairman of the governing body of Marlborough College that fewer stipendiary clergy, at a time of transition for the Church, would require more support from bishops and archdeacons, not less.
- If a Bishop of Ramsbury were appointed he should probably live north of the Plain, in order to signal that the diocese recognises the idiosyncratic nature of the topography of Wiltshire.
- The name of the See might be reviewed in the light of the significant population centres in the west of the county and the county town of Trowbridge. Similarly the name of the archdeaconries may need to be reviewed.
- Bishop Nicholas will undoubtedly take on national roles in the future, necessitating sufficient episcopal support in the Diocese.
- Not to reappoint might indicate surrender to decline, when mission is seen by both Bishop Nicholas and the consultation meeting attendees as the most significant priority for the Diocese.

### **8 Recommendations**

**8.1** The roles of bishop and archdeacon should not be combined.

**8.2** The current opportunity presented by the departure of the Archdeacon of Wilts to reduce the number of archdeacons to three should be grasped, with a recognition that there could be a return to four at a later date should this prove unworkable. This will necessitate a rethinking of role descriptions, with increased clarity about role distinction and duties between bishops and archdeacons.

**8.3** A Bishop of Ramsbury be appointed, who should live north of Salisbury Plain, preferably in Devizes.

**8.4** In making that appointment, the diocese responds positively to the invitation for bishops to make a greater difference in their civic engagement and in engagement with young people, influencing the need for sustainable communities and building the common good.

**8.5** Should the Dioceses Commission review the Dioceses of Bristol and Gloucester, the Diocese of Salisbury requests that the northern boundary of this Diocese be included.