



How to ...

Understand pastoral reorganisation

Pastoral reorganisation is the process of making rearrangements to parishes and benefices. This could be, for example:

- creating a new parish or benefice
- setting up or altering ministry structures
- amending patronage arrangements
- changing the designation of a church, or closing a church

Arrangements for parishes and benefices are all held together within legal documents called Pastoral Schemes. Sometimes changes are needed to these arrangements which will help mission in an area, or which will make sure that the local structures do not 'get in the way' of effective ministry. When this happens a new Pastoral Scheme is needed.

There are broadly four stages of consultation we need to go through to put a new Scheme in place.

Stage 1 – Early discussion and statement of intent

This is an open-ended stage where parishes, deaneries and others discuss and test out ideas. Once they agree some broad principles, the Diocesan officer prepares a 'statement of intent' on their behalf and presents this to the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee (part of our Bishop's Council). The DMPC is asked for their approval to develop the ideas into proposals for consultation.

Stage 2 – Informal consultation on skeleton proposals

This is where the broad principles are developed into a legal form of words called 'skeleton proposals'. The 'skeleton' contains all the specific details needed to allow the new arrangements to take shape. At this stage it is still informal consultation; we use this time to refine and clarify the details and to iron out any queries before starting formal consultation.

Stage 3 – Ascertainment of views on draft proposals

After a period of local consultation, and when everyone is in agreement with what is being proposed, we can enter the first stage of formal consultation. The Diocese issues a set of 'draft proposals' to interested parties, which includes the patrons, PCC(s), Area Dean, Archdeacon and others that have been involved in the process so far. This stage is called the 'Ascertainment of Views'.

There is a time limit for interested parties to respond to the Diocese on the draft proposals – they can make comments, raise objections or suggest amendments. Once this period is over, the DMPC will consider the proposals again in the light of any responses received, and make a decision about whether to continue to the next stage, or to amend the proposals and consult

again. Once they are satisfied that consultation is complete and issues resolved, they will recommend the proposals to the Bishop for the next stage.

Stage 4 – Publication of draft scheme

The Bishop is asked to approve the proposals as recommended by the DMPC and they are sent off to the Church Commissioners with a range of other supporting documents. The Commissioners use all this information to prepare a Draft Pastoral Scheme. This is the final stage of consultation and it is 'public' in that it's not limited just to interested parties. Because of its public nature, this stage has quite a few legal requirements that need to be met, such as a minimum time limit for consultation. During this time, all parishes must display public notices making copies of the Draft Scheme available to anyone who wants to view it.

The Church Commissioners receive comments or objections to the Draft Scheme on behalf of the Diocese. If there are any objections to the Draft Scheme, the Commissioners may decide to uphold the objection and ask the Diocese to amend the proposals and consult on them again.

What happens when all the stages of consultation are complete?

Once the Church Commissioners are satisfied that the consultation has been completed properly and any issues are resolved, they will arrange for the Pastoral Scheme to be signed and sealed. This is called 'making' the Scheme. It would take legal effect on a later date, which is decided depending on what the Scheme says.

Sometimes, after a Scheme is made and takes effect, other follow-up arrangements might be needed in a parish or benefice. For example, a new parish would need to have a new PCC constituted, or a new electoral roll; a new benefice may need to have clergy re-licensed. These follow-up arrangements will vary depending on the details in the Scheme, and can be talked through as part of the consultation processes.

What about minor changes?

Some minor rearrangements – such as parish boundary tweaks - can be dealt with through a shortened procedure called a Pastoral Order. In these cases, a draft Order would follow the above stages 1-3 and, if no issues arise, the Order can be 'made' locally by the Bishop. If any objections arose at Stage 3, then the Order would need to be revised into a Draft Scheme by the Church Commissioners and issued for Stage 4 - publication.

Where can I find out more?

The guiding legislation for pastoral reorganisation is the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011, which can be accessed online at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/2011/3/enacted>

The Church Commissioners' website also contains a lot of information on the 'pastoral and closed churches division' pages, which can be found at <https://www.churchofengland.org/clergy-office-holders/pastoralandclosedchurches.aspx>

Written by: Janey Hiller.