



Releasing the energy, the Diocese of Bristol's Strategy for 2010-2015, has been formed and developed by the Diocesan Strategy & Policy Group on behalf of the Bishop's Council.

Rationale

In developing this Strategy, the Strategy & Policy Group consistently sought to confront the reality of the situation facing the Diocese so that the Strategy might be robust in supporting the local faith communities in the Diocese in their ministry and mission through the circumstances they will face over the next five years.

This process has involved a great deal of prayer, soul-searching and many tough questions. It has also required the group devising the Strategy to be open to the considerable and rapid rate of change that they themselves, and the Diocese as a whole, are subject to. The kinds of issues that the Group considered were:

- the theology of ministry;
- the tradition and ecclesiology of the Church of England;
- the sociological context in which the Church of England, the Diocese of Bristol and the local communities that make it up find themselves during the early 21st Century;
- current thinking on missiology;
- the cultural and organisational dynamics of the Church;
- the ongoing progress of the 2005-2010 Strategy;
- trends in churchgoing and giving;
- trends in vocations in the Diocese;
- changes in legislation in the Church of England;
- changes in costs and alternative sources of income.

As a result, the Diocesan Strategy takes into account the following key factors.

Ministry

The activity of the Church of England has increasingly been oriented around the ministry of ordained ministers. The result has been twofold. First, the priesthood of all believers has been defined by the priesthood of ordained people rather than the other way round, leading to assumptions such as “the purpose of lay ministry is to help the vicar”. Second, we have ended up overburdening ordained people rather than paying attention to allowing them to play their part in releasing the energy of the whole people of God.

A number of structural and cultural factors have colluded with this trend. However, the Church of England has a clear, biblical theology of gifting and ministry: all believers are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9). All God's people are equipped for works of service (ministry), are given gifts by God (they are distributed throughout the body of Christ and not concentrated in one person) and are ministers (it is baptism that is the commissioning for ministry). However, there are those within the body of Christ with the particular gifts to equip other believers (Ephesians 4:7-13) and the three orders of ministry have clear and distinctive parts to play in this respect.

Leadership that serves, equips and releases the potential of others is therefore integral to the life of the body of Christ and any Diocesan Strategy that seeks to serve it. But such leadership extends beyond the vicar/priest-in-charge to those in other forms of ordained and lay ministry.

Against this theological background, the Diocese of Bristol has seen an enormous increase of those offering themselves for Licensed Lay Ministry, ordained Self-Supporting Ministry and, more recently, Ordained Local Ministry. Between 2005 and 2009, over 140 people will have been ordained or licensed for these “volunteer” ministries in the Diocese with a further 60 people either in training or likely to be selected for training in the coming months.

Whilst an ordained stipendiary ministry continues to have a key role in the ministry of the Church, the dispersal of gifts and leadership as part of a ministry team is not only a theological priority but also something God seems to be highlighting to the Diocese of Bristol through His calling to individuals for varying kinds of ministry.

Costs and income

In recent years, it has been impossible to ignore the increasing costs to dioceses of stipendiary clergy. Between 1997 and 2007, direct costs of stipendiary clergy to the Diocese (stipend, National Insurance contributions, pension contributions, Council Tax and water rates) rose from £16,000 to £31,000. By 2011, these costs will have risen to over £40,000. (These costs do not include significant other indirect costs such as housing, training and pastoral support).

These increases are largely a result of the need to fund the clergy pension scheme and far outstrip either increases in people’s average salaries, out of whose giving most of the Diocese’s income originates, or the numerical growth of the church. In order to fund as many stipendiary clergy in 2011 as in 1997, people would need to give 70% more or there would need to be an equivalent increase in numbers of people giving at those rates.

As a result, and even with a rationalised number of stipendiary clergy, in 2008, the Diocese requested a Parish Share figure which amounted to 107% of the calculated net potential declared by parishes. It is increasingly clear that more parishes are struggling to give the full sum requested by the Diocese. Another effect is that a smaller proportion of parishes’ actual income is available for them to deploy in ways they choose for their local mission.

Both these factors were being considered as the global economy ran into unprecedented conditions leading to the UK economy facing a recession of unknown depth or length. It has also become abundantly clear that a reliance on stipendiary clergy is a financially unsustainable model for the future of the mission of the Church. A radical and immediate reappraisal of how diocesan income is raised and spent was clearly necessary.

Equally, it became clear that the Diocese needed to diversify its income streams away from a reliance on the current Share system, which has been generating shortfalls of 7-9% (almost £0.5m), investment income etc and to increase the proportion of income generated in other ways. The Diocese has a good recent track record in generating income from major donors external to the Diocese and from charitable trusts. For example, it recently was one of a minority of dioceses to receive a grant of £0.5m for work in new housing areas and a quarter of the Diocese’s income comes from non-parochial sources. In the current economic climate, these income streams may be more vulnerable, but diversification must be cultivated.

Centralisation and regulation

Over the course of the 20th century, the structure of the Church of England became more centralised than it had been in the past. There were many good reasons for this:

- to provide equity for clergy receiving stipends;
- to ensure better governance and advice for local parish churches;
- and to make more strategic use of the Church of England’s resources.

Furthermore, in recent years, with an increase in legislation, it was necessary to provide more, not less, central support to help local churches on matters such as child protection, for example.

To support this work and infrastructure, an enormous amount of time, energy and resource is expended in diocesan boards, councils, committees and synods. Although the outcomes of this work are important for the oversight and management of the Diocese, it became clear that:

- many areas and issues addressed by the central diocesan structures and personnel might be more fruitfully addressed by structures and personnel more local to the area or issue being addressed;
- our structures require more work, time and energy than is necessary to secure those outcomes;
- the balance of effort required at diocesan level created an unhelpful dynamic in the Diocese;
- with a new strategy, spending priorities will change and some central activity will need to be refocused or stopped.

In June 2006, a shift was made to highlight an increased role for deaneries in diocesan activity. It was recognised that a greater degree of strategic oversight needed to be given from the “balcony view” provided by deanery leadership in addition to the “helicopter view” provided by Bishops and Archdeacons. Further resources were directed to the deaneries to support Area Deans and Lay Chairs in leading this work.

The period since has been a time of transition, providing a level of fluidity and creating opportunities to learn what it means to share oversight in this way. It became clear that more strategic decision-making responsibilities needed to be at deanery level. However, it was also clear that specialist support resource was still required at diocesan level to provide both strategic and standard support across the Diocese.

Any increase in deanery decision-making responsibility will have an inevitable impact on the central, governance and executive structures of the Diocese. In addition, the Strategy & Policy Group recognised that:

- more meetings take place than are necessary at the expense of time, travel (with an environmental impact) and expense;
- there is a degree of confusion between governance and executive responsibilities in our structures;
- the level of responsibility in some of our committees means it is hard to attract members;
- a greater degree of interdepartmental communication may be possible in our Diocese.

Development process

During 2007 and 2008, the Strategy & Policy Group, who had responsibility for the implementation of the 2005-2010 Diocesan Strategy, gave regular attention at their fortnightly meetings to the task of developing a new five year strategy. Between May and July 2008, the Strategy & Policy Group presented a draft Outline Strategy to Area Deans, Lay Chairs and the Bishop’s Council for consultation.

On 23 September 2008, an Outline Strategy was proposed to Bishop’s Council for approval in order that the Strategy & Policy Group might conduct wider consultation and work on detailed proposals.

This Outline Strategy was approved along with a request that an assessment be carried out of the ability of the central structures of the Diocese to support the delivery of the Strategy. This work was carried out by Pearce Mayfield and consisted first of a “Scoping Report” that was presented to Bishop’s Council by Patrick Mayfield on 6 November 2008. This led to a Limited Objective Maturity Assessment being carried out, conducted by Stewart Rapley. To create his assessment, Stewart conducted 14 individual or group interviews and presented a “Review of Strategy Support” to the Bishop’s Council on 4 February 2009. The review was endorsed unanimously and the Strategy & Policy Group was asked to incorporate it into their detailed proposals. That Review forms the basis of the “Delivering the Strategy” component of the Strategy.

At the same time, over 700 copies of an Executive Summary of the Outline Strategy were circulated via Deanery Synods and to attendees of the Equipped to Grow conferences as well as being posted, along with the full Outline Strategy, on the Diocesan website. Comments were invited and a number of submissions were made. Discussion groups took place with members of Strategy & Policy Group about the Outline Strategy at the Equipped to Grow conferences. All these submissions were fed into the development process.

Working Groups

In order to work on the detailed proposals, the following working groups were formed:

Vacancy Leadership Development: Christine Froude, Alan Hawker, Douglas Holt

RELEASE: Derek Chedzey, Mike Hill, Douglas Holt, Oliver Home, Sam Rushton

Deployment: Lesley Farrall, Tim McClure, Lee Rayfield

Share review: Patrick O'Connor, David Froude, Aurea Hart, Gwyn Owen, with Lesley Farrall, Matthew Hall and David Hargrave