

DIOCESES COMMISSION – DIOCESES OF BRADFORD, RIPON & LEEDS AND WAKEFIELD REORGANISATION SCHEME: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the purpose of the scheme?

To reorganise the diocesan structure in the area of West Yorkshire and the Dales to better enable the Church of England to relate to the communities of that area, not just the parishes themselves but also the cities, boroughs, districts and counties. Mission, not finance, is the guiding principle (though as mission needs to be financed, the wise husbanding of financial resources can't be ignored).

Is one diocese taking over the other two?

No. The scheme dissolves all three existing dioceses and creates a single new diocese in their place. No one existing diocese has primacy over the others.

Has a final decision been taken?

No. The draft scheme is out for consultation and anyone affected can write in to Mrs Joanna Winn-Smith, Asst Sec of the Dioceses Commission, at Church House, London SW1P 3AZ up until 30 April 2012. [E-mail: yorkshirereview@churchofengland.org]

How will it advance mission?

There will be more locally focused mission leadership as a result of having five bishops working in areas, closer to their communities. A combined administration will deliver a more economical and resilient way of supporting mission. Bringing the Church's diocesan structure more in line with those of local government will enable the Church to relate in a more focused way to the communities which it serves.

How will it affect individual parishes?

The proposals are designed to bring the five bishops of the diocese closer to the people with fewer diocesan bishops and more area bishops, including a new area bishop of Huddersfield. While there will be short term costs associated with the scheme, it should in time deliver financial savings as a result of the more efficient and focused delivery of diocesan services. A small number of parishes on the boundaries of the existing three dioceses are proposed for transfer to adjoining dioceses. These parishes are named in the scheme. In all cases consultation has been carried out.

What will happen to the relationship with the bishop?

The decentralisation to smaller episcopally-led mission units should enable bishops to be closer to parishes, clergy and people. It is proposed that the four area bishops would exercise a full range of delegated functions from the diocesan bishop. The diocesan bishop of Leeds would still be grounded in the ministry of the Leeds Area (as well as providing the interface between the whole diocese and the national church). How relationships develop will of course depend on decisions made locally as and when the new arrangements are up and running.

How are the current proposals different from those contained in the report issued in December 2010?

The main changes are the to see of the bishop of the new diocese – Leeds (not Wakefield), and hence to the name of the diocese – the diocese of Leeds – which may also be known as ‘the diocese of West Yorkshire and the Dales’; leaving the three cathedrals on an equal footing so that none of them is designated as ‘the principal cathedral’; the inclusion of provision for Leeds Parish Church to become a pro-cathedral if and when the bishop of Leeds decides it should. The main thrust of the proposals remains as set out in December 2010.

Haven't you already done a report and consultation? Why are you asking again?

The original consultation (in 2010) was on the broad themes and initial ideas of the Commission based on their research and visits to the dioceses. On receiving all the feedback from the consultation we have now put together a draft of the actual scheme (a form of legislation) which would create the new diocese and dissolve the old ones. The draft scheme reflects the input and thoughts of those who responded to the consultation.

Why isn't the new Diocese called 'West Yorkshire and the Dales'?

Dioceses are called after the town or city –where the seat or ‘see’ of the diocesan bishop is situated. The new diocese envisaged by the draft scheme is therefore ‘the diocese of Leeds’. Provision has however been made so that the diocese may be ‘known as the diocese of West Yorkshire and the Dales’ by way of a working title. This title could be used, for example, on church noticeboards / letter heads etc.

Isn't it odd to have a single diocese with more than one cathedral?

While there isn't a current English example, there have in the past been English dioceses with more than one cathedral – the diocese of Bristol and Gloucester in the 19th C being one example – and the Diocese in Europe and a number of current Irish dioceses have more than one. The current cathedrals of Bradford, Ripon and Wakefield all fulfil important roles in the mission of the Church in their respective communities and more widely; removing cathedral status from any one of them would not advance mission. The Dioceses Commission has therefore decided to exercise the statutory powers under which it works to retain all three cathedrals. However, the draft scheme does leave open the possibility if the diocesan bishop so directs of reducing the number of nationally-funded Residentiary Canons in any of the cathedrals from 2 to 1; and/or for one of these Canons to work at Leeds Parish Church if that seems appropriate. It will be for the new diocese over time to work out the most suitable pattern of cathedral ministry.

Why is it suggested that Leeds Parish Church might be a pro-cathedral?

There were various views put to the Dioceses Commission about this (which was not proposed in last year's report). Now that Leeds is to be the see of the diocesan bishop and the official title of the new diocese, it was noted that a future Bishop of Leeds might wish to designate Leeds Parish Church as a pro-cathedral and a 'seat of the bishop', should the life of the new diocese develop in such a way that this would be appropriate. Including this provision in the scheme keeps the options open for the new diocese in a way that would not otherwise be possible. It would only happen if it was wanted.

What about diocesan staff?

The work of diocesan staff is greatly valued and the proposal to re-shape the dioceses is not a reflection on the quality or dedication of individuals. It will be for the three existing dioceses to decide how best to staff the new diocese at the outset, taking into account relevant legal safeguards and acting in accordance with best HR practice. Over time it is nevertheless expected that there would be significant staff savings as the new diocese works out the most cost effective way of supporting mission in West Yorkshire and the Dales.

How might parishes that are have petitioned for extended episcopal ministry be affected?

The Bishop of Leeds, as the new diocesan, would under the terms of the Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod be obliged to make arrangements for petitioning parishes. The position of the Bishop of Beverley as Provincial Episcopal Visitor is not directly affected by the scheme. [NB Any such arrangements could separately be affected by new legislation (and an associated code of practice) in respect of the ordination of women to the episcopate].

When might all this come into effect?

The plan is that the three diocesan synods would be invited to approve the eventual scheme later next year (after comments on the draft scheme have been considered by the Dioceses Commission). The General Synod would then be in a position to consider it in July 2013. If the General Synod were to approve the scheme, preliminary provisions of the scheme could come into effect in the autumn of 2013. Full implementation would then follow at the end of 2013 or beginning of 2014. The Commission and the Preparation Group established by the three dioceses will, however, need to keep this intended timescale under review.

What will be the financial benefit of the scheme?

As a result of painstaking work by the three dioceses working together – co-ordinated by a Preparation Group appointed by the three bishops' councils – it is estimated that savings of the order of £0.8m a year can be achieved over time in the running costs of the new diocese, as against keeping all three dioceses going as at present.

Won't the proposals be very costly to implement?

There are inevitably some organisational costs that would be borne at the outset, but the pay back period of up to two and a half years for the diocese (and less than a year for the Church as a whole) is quite modest. We are confident that, in time, savings of around £0.8 million a year should accrue, with the majority of these accruing to the new diocese. It would be more expensive to carry on as we are.

What is the status of the financial estimate?

The Commission is obliged to publish an estimate of the financial effects of its proposals. Inevitably it is based on a set of assumptions and includes many figures which can only be illustrative. It is recognised that a whole range of issues will be dependant on local decisions by the new diocese and those working towards its formation.

Doesn't it look as if the Church Commissioners have most to gain financially from the scheme?

For historic reasons the Commissioners own the houses of two of the diocesan sees that are to go. Dioceses pay for area bishops' houses, so the new diocese has to buy two additional houses. The Commissioners have nevertheless indicated that they will assist the new diocese both with these one-off housing costs and with some of the transitional costs of the scheme. This is not an exercise in shifting costs from one part of the Church to another, but one that will accrue substantial savings for the Church as a whole.

Which dioceses will you be amalgamating next?

The Commission's brief is to keep the size, boundaries and numbers of dioceses 'under review'. There is no pre-determined hit list. At present the Commission's staff are fully engaged on this reorganisation scheme. Amalgamations represent only one aspect of its work; the Commission also works on boundary changes and on reviewing vacancies in suffragan sees. If the Commission should decide to embark on another amalgamation scheme, it will make that public as it would wish to consult widely.

FOR PARISHES THAT MAY TRANSFER TO A NEIGHBOURING DIOCESE

Why is it suggested that we transfer to another diocese?

A number of parishes around the perimeter of the proposed new diocese of Leeds are communities whose secular boundaries have shifted in recent years. There is an issue as to whether the Church's boundaries now reflect the reality on the ground. Where they run against the grain of other aspects of community life, there is a strong case for aligning the boundaries more closely with the communities that the Church serves. This has in many cases been borne out by the result of the Commission's consultations.

What will happen to our parish share?

An estimate of possible share levels has been given in section 6 of the Financial Estimate. The precise level – in what would be over two years hence – would be for the receiving diocese to decide; and it would be for them to determine whether there should be some transitional arrangements. It is no more possible to guarantee levels in the future than it would be if parishes were to stay put.

What happens to the church school?

Any church schools physically situated in the transferring parishes would automatically move across with the parish.

But you haven't accepted what we said in our response to the original proposals?

In a few instances the Commission has decided to keep a parish in the scheme for transfer because (a) the responses to the original proposal were not all of one mind; and/or (b) because neighbouring parishes were happy to transfer and practical issues would arise for them if they did not all transfer as a group. Including the parish in the scheme allows a period of further consultation on the proposal.

Does our PCC have any say?

Yes, the PCC is being formally consulted as an interested party, and it can make a representation to the Commission (by the end of April next year).