



Anglican Diocese  
of Adelaide

# Governance Review 2023

Purpose, composition and size of Diocesan Council

## Summary of Consultation Sessions

### Purpose

Synod 2022 passed a resolution *“requesting Diocesan Council to conduct a governance review focussing on the purpose, composition and size of Diocesan Council. The review is to encompass comprehensive parish engagement and consultation with independent persons. A report with recommendations is to be made to Synod 2023.”*

Diocesan Council appointed a Task Group to instigate the report. Its members are the Venerable Andrew Mintern, the Rev'd Michael Lane, Rev'd Julia Denny-Dimitriou, Katherine Dellit and the Secretary of Synod, Joe Thorp. The Task Group is assisted by the Governance Manager, Helen Clarke.

### Process

The Task Group decided on the following process:

- Circulate a summary of existing diocesan governance
- Consultation sessions across the Diocese
- Synthesise consultations feedback
- Engage external consultant
- Report back to Diocesan Council
- Circulate report widely
- Table report at Synod 2023



### Consultations

During late May and early June 2023, the Task Group conducted four consultations.

Led by Secretary of Synod and supported by the members of the Task Group who were represented at each session.

Nearly 100 people attended including clergy, lay persons, parish officers, Anglicare chaplains and staff.

Locations:

- St Michael's Mitcham,
- St George's Magill,
- St Jude's, Brighton,
- St John's Salisbury.



## Consultation outline

- Prayer
- Acknowledgement of Country
- Current governance structures
- Issues and possible resolutions
- Fit for 21st century?
- Grace

## What do you think Diocesan Council is responsible for?

Participants affirmed that Diocesan Council is the executive committee of Synod and that it is also a sounding board providing advice to the Archbishop.

Its responsibilities include:

- Strategic policy setting
- Implementing Synod's decisions and supporting Synod processes
- Overseeing the implementation of the Diocesan Vision
- Decision making in between sessions of Synod
- Stewardship – of people and communities and of resources (financial and property)
- Compliance – secular law, church law, diocesan policies
- Oversight of St Barnabas College and AFSA
- Communication
- Oversight of Synod Office, through the Secretary of Synod

While some participants felt pastoral activity is not its sphere of responsibility, DC should provide the means for delivering it. Some believe DC is responsible for the wellbeing of clergy and for being aware of what is happening in parishes and supporting the welfare of parishes.

Some participants understand DC as having a role in reviewing what is necessary for theological education and formation, and to advise on appointments. Some understand DC to be responsible for approving faculties.

## What is DC doing for Synod and/or for your parish?

Participants recognised that DC

- is focussed on mission and implementing the diocesan Vision
- has made a significant commitment to refocusing the Diocese
- is encouraging collaboration between parish communities
- is improving transparency about what it does – DC Information Updates
- is managing financial risk
- is acting on directions from Synod
- receives reports from its committees (PFRC, DRAC) and from other working groups appointed by Synod

DC has done the following things for parishes:

- given DC approval for decisions about parishes and parish property disposals
- manages aspects of parish life, such as safe ministry clearances

- introduced operational policies, such as the ministry wellbeing policy
- support with compliance
- provision of structures and resources
- PFRC helped with issues parishes raised about parish buildings
- PFRC provided helpful responses to applications
- PFRC input into major projects and contracts has been helpful.

While many participants were unclear about what matters come before DC, others noted and welcomed the recent introduction of Information Updates specifically about DC business and outcomes. These updates are circulated electronically following each DC meeting.

Some commented that while some parish property sales were handled well, others seemed protracted and communication from Synod Office was not always clear. Parishes were left confused about what steps they needed to take to finalise the process. Delays with payment of sale proceeds were regrettable as this resulted in parishes losing out on interest and/or dividend payments.

### **What should DC be doing that it is not doing?**

1. A need for better two way communication between DC and parishes was a common theme. Many called for a user friendly website and cited a desire to connect and communicate with and listen to people who are not Synod-representatives.
2. Others wanted to know how parishes could raise matters that they would like to be on DC's agenda and asked DC to facilitate this.
3. Some participants want DC to be better informed about how parishes are actually travelling. This would enable timely consultation with vulnerable parishes to occur and for proactive support to be given.
4. More encouragement and positive feedback for clergy and parishes was called for.
5. Some participants would like to see DC draw on the collective wisdom available in the Church. They suggested that DC should adopt a regular review cycle for Ordinances, policies and structures. The schedule for the year ahead could be published annually, with an invitation to have a say about how they should be updated.
6. Take leadership around maintenance of church buildings
7. Provide guidance/leadership about WHS issues
8. Do more about church culture – developing, unifying (Vision)
9. More consultation about spending money in ways that parishes have no control over – wellbeing & supervision
10. More centralised support for parishes, including management of parish finances
11. Ensure equitable principles of Assessment Ordinance are upheld– especially those parishes that under estimate their parish income
12. Publicise who the members of DC are, including profiles: encourage sense of community and responsibility
13. Provide new wardens and parish council members with a list of 'who's who': including role and contact details and updates when staff changes
14. Clarify what the structures are within DC
15. Work to break down 'them and us' perception: parishes feel alienated/remote from DC
16. Encourage lay people to have 'proper' involvement at Synod
17. Celebrate success stories – which churches are flourishing?
18. Be more proactive in engaging and initiating change
19. Provide training for clergy and lay leaders on financial management and property
20. After property sales, communicate better with parishes and facilitate prompt payment to parish of its share of sale proceeds

Many participants were concerned that DC members have been reluctant to discuss DC business outside the DC meeting because they were bound to keep matters confidential. This was flagged as an area that could be explored by DC. It might be appropriate to adopt the Chatham House Rule. DC members should have the scope to reassure stakeholders that DC has been well briefed and that it has considered relevant issues before making decisions. However it remains important that DC members respect the confidentiality of who said what and who voted in favour of what.

### Who is on DC and how do they get there?

There was a fairly good understanding of the composition of DC. Some participants were unclear as to how many were appointed by the Bishop or DC and how many were elected by Synod.

It was noted by one group that there was a 'progressive' and a 'conservative' ticket for the election of prospective candidates. However, they observed that although getting elected to DC could be politicised, the issues that DC deals with do not tend to be political. The hope was expressed that a balance between progressives and conservatives was achieved by making judicious appointments.

### Issues with make-up of DC?

Many participants raised concerns about

- Lack of requirement for diversity on DC (race/culture, first nations, immigrants, gender, theological background, postcode, progressive vs conservative)
- Ensuring there is a good mix of skills, so that DC can fulfil its functions
- Fear that those who are appointed by the Bishop may not be objective – owe allegiance to him/her
- Perception that DC dominated by senior clergy (Assistant Bishops, Dean and 2 Archdeacons)
- Size of DC - too big to be effective decision makers
- Perception that 'management' dominates DC
- Perception that DC an 'echo chamber' – members echo the wishes of leadership, particularly where the person is an appointee of the Archbishop
- Inadequate representation of range of theological thought
- Inadequate representation of **all** parishes – postcode bias
- No limit on how long a person can be on DC

There was animated discussion about whether the ratio of elected members (12) to appointed members (8) is right. Some observed that 'Church' is much bigger than parishes and wondered how non-parish based church is represented at Synod and at Diocesan Council. For example, making decisions about the future of the Church in the Diocese, DC should surely be aware of issues that affect key Anglican entities such as Anglican schools and Anglicare.

Concern was expressed that all members of DC are elected/appointed at the same time for a 3 year term. Some participants were concerned about the inability to have 'succession planning' at DC and suggested that members' terms should be staggered, so as to minimise the loss of experience/improve continuity each triennium.

Several people voiced management of conflicts as an issue. Members of DC are also generally members of parishes. Even if the person does not vote on a DC decision affecting their parish, there is a perception that that parish has had a voice at DC that is not afforded to other parishes who do not have a representative on DC. They suggested that a parish representative be invited to attend meeting for that discussion.

Motivation for being on DC – personal prestige or dominance

- Encourage more people to come forward as Synod representatives
- Prepare a 'job description' for DC members and circulate 12 months before election

- Run information sessions and/or provide training for prospective Synod representatives 6 months before parish Vestry in election years

While many cited the size as a barrier to open discussion and DC's ability to be agile and nimble, others saw DC's size as a positive. The current size allows for diversity of theological positions, prevents concentration of power and allows for wider discussion of directions that may be controversial or radical.

Some believe that DC decisions should require agreement of the representatives from each House (bishop, clergy, lay). This would mirror the requirement for changes to the Constitution to be made only when a majority from each House supports the change.

### **What would you change and why?**

There was a fair degree of overlap between answers to this question and the previous one.

There was much discussion but no consensus as to the optimal size of DC. Some argued that a decrease in size would lead to efficiency. Others recognised that DC is significantly smaller now than it was 15 years ago (40+) and that the current size means that DC is reasonably representative of the many different communities that make up the Synod itself. That breadth of representation would be diminished if the size of DC were to be reduced.

It was suggested that if DC stays its current size, 'rules' could be introduced to avoid the same few voices dominating meetings and prolonging deliberations. For example, each person would be allowed to speak to each agenda item once only.

If DC's size was to be reduced, it was felt that cuts should be made to positions that are filled by appointment rather than those that are elected. Synod is more likely to 'own' DC if DC members are elected rather than appointed/ex officio.

It was noted that clergy can appoint 1 member to the parish council for each 3 members elected by Vestry, and that this ratio could be replicated on DC.

Introduce a requirement to have been a member of the Church for a stipulated period before being eligible to stand as a Synod representative/member of DC

There was strong support from multiple participants for establishing a skills matrix and for filling positions on DC (and on its various committees) with candidates who provide a good mix of skills. Several groups believed the development of a 'job description' for DC members could be helpful as it would assist electors at Synod to assess the suitability of candidates.

Similarly, many recommended that DC work to raise the profile of Synod representatives, by explaining what they do and the pivotal role they play in setting the church's goals. This should occur well before elections for parish Synod representatives are due to take place at Annual Vestry meetings. The importance of the role should be promoted among all lay members of the Church, to attract people with a range of diverse skills and backgrounds.

If lay Synod representatives come from diverse backgrounds, and are well qualified and motivated, this should be reflected in the pool of lay people offering themselves for election to DC. The variety of styles in the Anglican Church was recognised as one of the Church's strengths, and that range of perspectives should be reflected on DC.

DC's dual role (council of advice to Archbishop versus management committee of the association) was considered problematic by some. They wondered if the role should be split, with one body giving advice about Church and faith issues, and another body taking responsibility for secular issues. Alternatively, if DC retains its dual role, the agenda could be structured to make it abundantly clear which items require DC to give advice to the Archbishop, and which items require DC to act as Synod's management committee and decision making body.

A few participants expressed strong views about changing the Constitution so that only one assistant bishop has an ex officio position on DC, and to remove the requirement that the Bishop appoint two Archdeacons. Instead it was suggested that the Bishop could make one clergy appointment, and one lay appointment. It would be open to all Archdeacons to seek election to DC.

Another suggestions was that the Archdeacons should take turns to be on DC, so that at any given time there are 2 Archdeacons on DC and 2 off. Another possibility would be for all 3 Assistant Bishops to be non-voting members of DC. Yet another variation would be to tweak DC membership to include appointment of 1 assistant bishop, no archdeacons: elect 6 (or 8) lay members and 6 clergy (with archdeacons and assistant bishops able to nominate for election).

Another suggestion was to consider the formation of a Selection Committee which would appoint members of DC. Synod would elect the members of the Selection Committee, which would identify candidates who possess the necessary skills, qualifications, and dedication to serve on the Diocesan Council.

Multiple participants supported the introduction of term limits (9 – 12 years/3 – 4 triennia) for DC membership. This should encourage diversification, avoid stagnation and reduce the risk of power being held by a small group.

Where DC identified a gap in skills within its membership, this could be fixed by giving DC the power to co-opt experts to assist on particular issues.

Consideration could be given to electing lay reps and clergy for each archdeaconry, so as to achieve representation from across the whole Diocese. Preferential voting or other forms of voting could also be explored in an attempt to achieve balanced geographic representation.

Some called for DC to focus on helping and enabling parishes to give life to the Diocesan Vision and 'growing the church'. There is a sense that too much time at DC and in parishes is spent looking at infrastructure and maintenance issues. Participants are looking to DC to give a lead by striking a balance between mission and mission development versus administration and compliance. Many see the need to devote more time to looking outwards and forwards but struggle to see how to achieve this given the regulatory and compliance burden.

Most participants included comments about the need for better communication. While electronic Information Updates about DC 'happenings' were a welcome innovation, some queried whether this information filtered through to people in the pews. Others warned against the assumption that everyone had access to electronic communication.

There was strong support for raising the profile of existing DC members and promoting transparency of who the members of DC are, including profiles, on the website. This would encourage a sense of community and responsibility

## **Fit for 21st century?**

The way sessions of Synod are currently run does not provide a forum that is conducive to talking about the big issues. Some wondered whether DC faces the same issue and also whether younger working people are in a position to serve on DC, given the multiple demands on their time and talents

Some queried whether the current Parliamentary model for Synod was the best fit and suggested that the Uniting Church's consensus model may be more appropriate?

Many noted the tension between a model where central planning and strategy could be discerned and implemented as opposed to the original permission giving Synodical model. The primacy of parishes should remain paramount.

Some reflected that few people are familiar with what the Ordinances say. They need to be simplified. Some thought parishes find them a hindrance rather than a help. Parishes want more flexibility about how they are governed. Some advocated for a move towards more policy development and fewer Ordinances.

While Synodal government places great restrictions on the exercise of power by bishops, in reality mid-career clergy rely on their bishop for their next appointments and lay people often act as though they have no power. Part of the challenge is to re-invigorate lay involvement and to dispel the perception that clergy are the ultimate decision makers. This perception exists in parishes, and flows through to sessions of Synod, where clergy do most of the talking.

The Church does not need to replicate the corporate world and its values. It can be confident in its own values. DC should model for the Diocese what it means to be Anglican, and should not be afraid to spend time on Christian reflection/retreats.

In a similar vein, clergy and the bishop should be leading the Christian/Anglican movement ie being the people of God. They should not be weighed down by managing the institution.

Perhaps DC could organise conferences where representatives from each church could co-ordinate how to develop effective programmes for: youth: refugees: food relief etc.

## **Next steps:**

An independent consultant will review the existing governance requirements and the feedback from the consultation sessions and will provide insights as to what, if anything might be changed.

Notes from consultation to be made available to consultation participants.

Task group to compile draft report for DC.

Report to be circulated before Synod.