

Dear all,

I'm writing to you because you gave us your email address at one of the public meetings we held in Ryde, Gosport and Cowplain last October relating to our proposals for reorganising of parishes.

First of all, thank you for taking the time to attend that meeting, and for the feedback that you were able to give on our original proposals.

Our Bishop's Council – who are clergy and lay people elected by worshippers from each area of our diocese – also examined hundreds of emails, letters and petitions, and held around 30 other meetings with individual clergy and PCCs. They delayed making a decision at their meeting in December to give them time to read all the responses they had received.

The original proposals have been drafted and re-drafted several times since October to reflect that feedback. The proposals considered at the Bishop's Council meeting on January 28 therefore include fresh ideas, including some suggested by people such as you. So thank you for being involved.

Secondly, as you will have heard at those public meetings, the idea behind these proposals is to find new ways to revitalise what the Church of England does in this area. We appreciate and celebrate all the good work that goes on at the moment. We also understand that the Church is ultimately there to help people to become Christians and to develop their faith further. That's why our proposals focus on new styles of church, alongside more traditional ones.

The precise shape of what that might look like in each area is yet to be decided, but it could involve appointing specialist ministers with experience of planting new churches, operations managers to make better use of our church buildings, and specialists to work with children and young people. In each area, they would work under a 'team rector' who would have overall responsibility for the Church's mission in that patch.

To make that possible, we've suggested that parishes can work more closely together in three specific areas – central Gosport, the town of Newport, and the Leigh Park estates. Working together allows those congregations to share some of the expertise mentioned above – for instance, it makes more sense for a paid youth worker to operate throughout the town of Newport, rather than just a small part of it. Becoming one 'team ministry' saves time and energy that currently goes on operating separate parish structures.

Some important points to note:

- Working together as a team ministry does not mean closing churches – it means retaining the congregations we have and creating new ones.
- It does not mean those areas have fewer ministers – it means appointing more clergy and lay people than we do now.
- It does not mean the Church of England is withdrawing from those areas – it means we are investing more into these areas.

The precise arrangement of which parishes might come together has altered throughout our consultation process. We want to thank those who have been involved in re-shaping our proposals.

I'm writing, therefore, to let you know what has now been proposed. Our Bishop's Council has recommended the following arrangement of parishes:

GOSPORT:

- the parishes of Bridgemary, Elson and Rowner would come together in a new team ministry, with a team rector and a church-planting team vicar.
- the parishes of Forton, Christ Church and Holy Trinity, would form another team ministry, with a team rector and a church-planting team vicar.

- the church council of St John's, Forton, have asked if their church building could be transformed into a 'mission hub', which would serve the whole of Gosport. It would therefore cease to be a separate parish and regular Sunday worship would end – to enable worshippers to find new ways to share the Christian faith with residents across the whole town.

ISLE OF WIGHT:

- the parishes of Newport Minster, St John's Newport, Carisbrooke and Barton would form one new team ministry, with a team rector, a team vicar and a church-planting team vicar – these three clergy would also be responsible for the parish of Gatcombe.
- The more rural parishes of Arreton and Newchurch have been removed from the reorganisation plans, in recognition that their circumstances are different.

HAVANT:

- the parishes of Leigh Park, Warren Park and West Leigh would form a team ministry with a team rector and church-planting team vicar.
- Bishop's Council members considered the responses from many members of the churches and community that were opposed to this idea, and also considered the responses from all three church councils. Although all three PCCs had reservations and wanted to retain their current clergy, they could see the advantages of working more closely together to reduce administration and free up time and energy.

These draft proposals don't contain the full details of what is planned for these areas, but these are the basic legal building blocks that outline the bare minimum of clergy posts in these areas. We want those who already worship in these churches to help us to work out who else we should appoint, such as operations managers and specialist ministers, as they are needed. This may look very different in each of these three areas.

If these proposals are approved, the creation of these team ministries means that the existing clergy roles would no longer exist. Our current clergy in all three areas can apply for the new posts.

We are now moving into eight weeks of formal consultation on these proposals. Those who are directly affected have been contacted and will be invited to say what they think. Those written responses will be received between now and March 29 and will be examined in detail. If you have any comments to make, please inform your local Parochial Church Council (PCC), which will be putting together a formal response on behalf of your local church.

On April 3, the Bishop's Council will decide whether it would like to recommend these plans to the bishop. If they are approved, the bishop would then send them to the Church Commissioners for approval.

The Church Commissioners, part of the national Church of England, would then hold a further consultation over the next few months. This would include letters sent to all interested parties and notices pinned to church doors. It will then be up to the Church Commissioners to make the ultimate decision.

We appreciate that this has been and will be a complicated process, and we would like to continue to keep you informed.

Thank you again for all of your emails, responses, support and participation so far. I look forward to working with you all in the weeks and months ahead.

Yours sincerely,

Jenny Hollingsworth

Secretary to Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee