Shared Local Ministry

Frequently Asked Questions for Diocesan Synod July 2026

This note is intended to be read alongside the Shared Local Ministry paper and presentation.

1. Why is change needed?

The present pattern is already under strain. The diocese is seeking to sustain Christian worship, pastoral care and mission across a large rural area with many churches, persistent vacancies, ageing congregations, significant buildings responsibility, and increasing pressure on clergy, Rural Deans, parish officers and volunteers. The same pressure is being felt across most dioceses: falling attendance, rising costs and fewer clergy. Continuing as we are would mean relying still further on goodwill, vacancies and overstretch. Doing nothing is itself a choice, with its own costs to attendance, clergy wellbeing, vacancy cover and parish resilience.

2. What is Shared Local Ministry?

Shared Local Ministry is a way of enabling local churches to flourish through teams of lay and ordained people working together.

It brings together:

- Focal Ministers, commissioned by the Bishop as a local focus of ministry and presence
- Oversight Ministers, incumbents who oversee and enable local teams
- Youth Hubs and youth ministry, engaging with young people, and, in doing so, potentially also reaching their families
- Area Deans, supporting collaborative working and vacancy cover
- Area Mission Coordinators, providing administrative and practical support

The proposal rests on the conviction that God has already given gifts for ministry across our parishes, and that the diocese needs to recognise, form and support those gifts more deliberately. The theological grounding for this is set out in a companion paper.

3. What would Area Deans do?

Area Deans would provide full-time local leadership across an area.

They would support Oversight Ministers, act as Oversight Ministers for parishes in vacancy, support clergy and Chapters, help develop mission and discipleship, enable more collaborative working, and facilitating local networking for mission and discipleship (including across Oversight Ministers, Rural Church Missioners and Youth Hubs).

They are supported by the Area Mission Coordinators and work in close collaboration with Rural Church Missioners and Area Coordinators where those roles are in place.

4. Why six Area Deans?

Six Area Deans would provide a diocesan pattern of local leadership and support. This number considers envisaged capacity to effectively cover more than one deanery, as well as recognising current budget realities.

The current Rural Dean role is being asked to carry increasing responsibility alongside full parish ministry. This proposal gives dedicated time to work that is already necessary, but not sustainably held in the present structure. Rural Deans would have the opportunity to either apply for the Area Dean role or be released to focus on full-time parish ministry, according to where they feel called.

5. **What happens to current Rural Deans?**

   Area Deans would take on the core responsibilities currently carried by Rural Deans.

   Local knowledge will still matter. Some areas may need Assistant Area Deans, former Rural Deans or other local leaders to support continuity and transition.

6. **What happens to Deanery Synods, Chapters, Standing Committees and Lay Chairs?**

   They continue unless proper local decisions are made to work differently.

   The proposal does not automatically abolish deaneries, Chapters, Deanery Synods, Standing Committees or Lay Chair roles. Some areas may choose closer collaboration over time, but that would involve local conversation and proper process.

7. **Is this pastoral reorganisation?**

   No.

   Shared Local Ministry does not itself redraw parish or benefice boundaries. Parishes keep their own identity and PCCs continue. Pastoral reorganisation may still be needed in some places, but that is a separate legal process.

   Area Deans would help local areas think about sustainable ministry and deployment, but they do not replace the proper diocesan and legal processes for pastoral reorganisation.

8. **Does this mean deaneries will merge?**

   Shared Local Ministry does not itself redraw deanery boundaries. Area Deans will work with deaneries to discern the best local governance structures for them.

9. **Are Area Deans parish clergy or diocesan staff?**

   Area Deans are ordained priests, serving across an area rather than in a single benefice or deanery. Their particular responsibility is vacancy support, Oversight Ministry and collaborative local leadership: the work of a priest, not a conventional incumbent and not a detached administrator.

   They are counted within the diocese's clergy numbers and paid from stipendiary funds, rather than added as a further tier of staff on top of parish ministry.

   Their purpose is to strengthen parish ministry, not to distance clergy from it.

10. **What is Oversight Ministry?**

    Oversight Ministry is a way of exercising parish priesthood through a wider team.

    Oversight Ministers remain responsible for mission and ministry across the churches entrusted to them. Their role is to discern, encourage, train, support and enable others, including Focal Ministers, Self-Supporting Ministers, Licensed Lay Ministers and those in commissioned local ministry roles.

    Oversight Ministry should not mean withdrawal from local ministry. It should mean priestly oversight that releases and supports the gifts of others.

11. **What is a Focal Minister?**

    A Focal Minister is commissioned by the Bishop to serve a particular church community as a local focus of ministry, presence and connection, under the oversight of the Oversight Minister.

A Focal Minister may already hold another authorised ministry role, such as commissioned Worship Leader or Pastoral Visitor, Licensed Lay Minister, Licensed Lay Funeral Minister, or self-supporting ordained minister.

The Focal Minister commission identifies the person's focal responsibility in a particular local context. It does not replace any other licence, Permission to Officiate, commission or authorisation.

12. How will Focal Ministers and Oversight Ministers be formed and supported?

Focal Ministers will have an initial formation period of around 12 to 18 months, followed by continuing support and review.

Oversight Ministers will have a two-year initial formation programme, with support from the Area Dean.

Formation is practice-based and continues beyond the initial period, through learning communities and regular pastoral supervision, rather than a single front-loaded course.

Both roles will need clarity, formation, support and review if the model is to be trusted locally.

13. What will Area Mission Coordinators do?

Area Mission Coordinators are administrative posts supporting Area Deans and Oversight Ministers.

Their work may include communication and coordination, safeguarding and HR processes, occasional offices, finance, funding and grant applications, buildings support, faculties, DAC processes, graveyards and memorial applications. They are supervised and supported by the respective Area Dean.

While focusing on these tasks, their purpose is to release clergy, parishes and ministers for mission and ministry.

14. How does this relate to Rural Church Missioners?

Rural Church Missioners and supporting Area Coordinators are already part of mission support in some areas.

Area Deans will work with Rural Church Missioners and Area Coordinators, where those roles are in place, so that local mission support, oversight and administration are aligned rather than separate.

15. How will Area Mission Coordinators work with other church administrators?

Area Mission Coordinators will work carefully and collaboratively with other church administrators in the deaneries which they cover, with the support of the Area Dean and the relevant managers of those administrators to ensure that these roles are complementary.

16. How does this relate to Youth Hubs?

Youth Hubs are part of the same wider approach to mission and ministry.

The proposal includes work with young people, growing disciples, forming new worshipping communities, and helping churches engage with younger people. This matters because age imbalance is one of the major missional challenges facing the diocese.

The Area Deans take on the role of Chairing the local partnership group(s) for the Youth Hub(s) in their respective area.

17. What will it cost?

The current 2027 budget assumption is:

- 6 Area Deans: £444,000 from stipendiary funds and base budget
- 6.5 FTE Area Mission Coordinators: £253,000 total, but £182,000 net cost (taking into account existing administrative roles covered by existing strategic funding)
- Youth Hubs scaling-up: £590,000 from new strategic funding (SMF 43%, DIP 57%)
- Training and support from the existing MDO budget

18. How will the Area Dean posts be funded?

Area Deans are clergy posts. They are paid from stipendiary funds and counted within the diocese's clergy numbers, rather than added as extra staff funded from Parish Offer.

Area Mission Coordinators and Youth Hub expansion are funded separately, from strategic project funding including SMF / DIP, not from Parish Offer. Area Mission Coordinators are fixed-term unless ongoing funding is secured by deaneries.

The financial implications will be monitored as part of implementation and review, including actual spend, funding assumptions and impact on the wider diocesan budget.

19. Will this save money?

Not immediately.

The proposal is better understood as a way of creating a more sustainable pattern of ministry and enabling better long-term deployment decisions.

Over time, Area Deans should help the diocese and deaneries have better-informed conversations about deployment and cost. That is a longer-term expectation, not an immediate saving.

20. Will this increase attendance or giving?

The intended outcomes include stronger attendance, more volunteer lay and ordained leaders, more services and missional activity, and increased giving of time and money.

These are aims to be reviewed, not guaranteed results.

The proposal draws on wider learning that churches with Focal Ministry can see growth in Average Weekly Attendance, but local impact in Hereford will need to be tested through review.

21. How will this be phased and reviewed?

The proposal is for six Area Deans to be appointed as part of a diocesan pattern, rather than testing the idea in only one locality.

The work will develop in stages: Area Deans first, then the further development of Oversight Ministry, the commissioning of Focal Ministers, the deployment of Area Mission Coordinators, and the wider formation of local ministry teams.

Operational oversight by Director of Mission & Ministry and regular quarterly (or half-yearly) reporting to SPMB. Monitoring and evaluation according to an agreed results framework, with baseline set at the start of implementation.

Formative (internal) evaluation after 18 months and a full (ideally external) evaluation at 3 years. Evaluations will look at key aspects, including health of worshipping communities

(number of services and attendance), clergy workload, vacancy support, engagement of volunteer leaders, PCC confidence, finance, Parish Offer, safeguarding confidence, worship sustainability, Eucharistic provision, and the effectiveness of Area Deans, Oversight Ministers and Area Mission Coordinators.