

DIOCESAN SYNOD

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



Sebastian Hamilton, Sandwich Deanery

Could we please make use of a cloud-based document management system so that the latest version of each paper for each meeting is easily accessible?

Alongside the existing email communication, this would help to ensure that email problems do not stand in the way of members receiving papers, it would assist those of us who wish to work in a paperless way, it would allow papers to be downloaded in advance much more easily (reducing concerns that meeting venues might not have good WiFi), and it would make it much easier for those with busy inboxes to identify and study the correct paperwork.

Iain Blythe responded:

Thanks for the question, Sebastian. We do this but I am very grateful for the opportunity to point people in the direction of the papers.

Papers are always made available on the website

<https://www.canterburydiocese.org/our-life/our-governance/diocesan-synod/2026/>

Past papers are also available there and we are looking to improve access to documents for Synod members in the coming months.

We use the email as a backup as not everyone is at the same level with regards to IT, but the most recent and updated papers will always be on the website.

Paul Worledge, Thanet

Within the Strategy Overview document, 'A Health and Vitality Review' (HVR) featured. This is not something that we have been made aware of before. Could it be clarified why we are using the HVR, how the tiers are calculated and what its purpose is?

Colin Evan responded:

Health C Vitality Reviews are a requirement of the Strategic Mission C Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) Diocesan Investment Programme funding request. We believe that they are also a helpful tool to support deanery planning and our three-way conversation between parishes, deaneries and the Diocesan Board of Finance.

They are a review of the missional and financial strength of every parish with categories of strong, moderate, weak or very weak. They represent a current position and an aspiration for five years. The initial round of reviews were done by Area Deans and Lay Chairs along with their Archdeacon. They were informed by attendance and financial data returns from parishes (including trends over recent years) supplemented by knowledge of local circumstances.

For simplicity an overall Health C Vitality category of Tier 1 to 4 was used to summarise. Tier 1 would typically be missionally and financially strong. Tier 4 would typically be missionally and financially more challenged.

The intention of Health C Vitality Reviews is not to create a league table but to identify how we take forward revitalisation and to identify what support might be needed. They are therefore a tool to inform deanery discussion and planning over the coming years. They sit alongside, and are complementary to, parish Mission Action Plans (Three Things). There was not time or capacity to hold these initial reviews with every parish individually, but we hope that they will form a base for healthy discussion.

Potential questions were developed for each Health C Vitality tier which are set out in the table below:

Tier	Key lines of enquiry
Tier 1	<p>What might help you to grow further?</p> <p>Could you help a nearby parish with support to help them grow?</p> <p>Could you grow your financial strength to help support other parishes?</p>
Tier 2	<p>What might help you to grow further?</p> <p>What might help you to strengthen your financial position?</p>
Tier 3	<p>What help might you need with missional and financial growth?</p>
Tier 4	<p>What might be helpful to support your mission and financial plans?</p> <p>Are you willing to receive help from another parish?</p>

The initial round of reviews feed into our diocesan strategy and identify where we think we are now in an overall sense (not on a parish-by-parish basis) and where we hope to be with investment and support in five years.

Iain Blythe added:

I am grateful to Colin for this comprehensive response.

It is important to note the information Health C Vitality Review is based on are those submissions made by individual benefices and PCCs on attendance, finance and so on each year. The National Church Institutions have that data and, I assume, make their own calculations.

The DBF was given grant funding to undertake a project on terms that allowed the Board to include the voice of deaneries to ensure the analysis was not driven by data alone. (We had considered asking PCCs to be involved but the logistics meant this was not possible in the time frames we were working to.)

The meetings were held by deanery with the Area Dean, Lay Chair, Archdeacon and members of the staff team. They worked to provide local context to the data.

I believe this has turned what would have been a cold analysis into one that has provided a local voice. I have said many times that whatever strategy is decided upon we want to ensure no one is left behind. The Three Things is also part of this analysis, together with the consultations on governance, finance, engagement and strategy that have taken place since the summer of 2025.

A key outcome of this consultation has been the desire for PCCs to share their successes (and struggles) with one another, and this will form a key element of any submission to SMMIB for funding particularly in the areas of leadership, growing disciples and training.

It is clear that **every** PCC has something to offer those discussions and the development of strategy and the Review has enabled an analysis of information already in the public domain to provide an understanding of the incredible work done by colleagues across the diocese.

Sue Rose, Vineyard Deanery

My understanding from the Health and Vitality review is that as an Area Dean I am not permitted to share the deanery report or data in order to brief colleague incumbents. Please could we consider sharing more widely the data and outcomes for each parish and giving us a clear view of the expectations regarding the use of this tool.

Iain Blythe responded

Thank you for your question, Sue.

This is not the case. The Health and Vitality review has been a comprehensive analysis of those statistics submitted by PCCs to the National Church Institutions over a period of several months.

The work with Area Deans, Lay Chairs and Archdeacons concluded in late February and the first opportunity to discuss this as a group takes place at the Area Deans and Lay Chairs meeting on 12 March 2026, two days before the Synod meeting.

That meeting will help inform an understanding of how the process was received and what support Area Deans and Lay Chairs will need in sharing the information more widely.

I hope people will understand that analysing the information has been the priority to date and sharing the information piecemeal on a deanery-by-deanery basis would not have been helpful.

I am grateful to everyone who has been involved in this and the other consultations. It has significantly improved the understanding of what is done in this diocese. It has also informed the progress made on finance, governance, engagement and strategy and means it is the local voice that determines how Canterbury develops in the coming years.

Iain Blythe
March 2026