

Discussion paper on the future governance and administrative arrangements within the Edgemoor Group



Background:

Over recent years, more and more rules and regulations have resulted in a greater administrative burden being placed on the Edgemoor Group. With its 11 parishes, the current governance arrangements place a heavy administrative load on the Team Rector, which looking ahead is felt to be unsustainable. The current arrangements also place a significant responsibility on PCC members themselves and some PCCs are finding it difficult to recruit new members, including Churchwardens with their substantial responsibilities.

Currently each of the 11 parish PCCs in the Edgemoor Group meets four times a year and the Team Rector is the chair of each PCC. Additionally a meeting of all Churchwardens is held three times a year, these being attended by the Ministry Team and chaired by the Team Rector.

The key responsibilities of a PCC include:-

- With the incumbent to promote the mission of God in the parish
- To provide a voice in the forms of service used by the parish
- Care and maintenance of church buildings and their contents (as executed by churchwardens)
- Managing the finances of the parish and keeping appropriate accounting records
- Maintaining the Electoral Roll and preparing and submitting the annual report and other required returns to the Group
- A duty of care to ensure the protection of the vulnerable in the church community.
- Provide representation at the Deanery Synod
- May make representation to the bishop on matters that affect the welfare of the parish

It is considered that a new way of working for the Group should be explored and the idea of setting up a Joint Council, has been raised as a potential means of addressing some of these pressures. A Joint Council is one which is delegated responsibility by PCCs for carrying out certain or all of their responsibilities, and is representative of all PCCs involved. Being able to remove some of the administrative burden will also allow PCC members to focus more attention on the specific Ministry needs of the Parish.

A new set of Church Representation Rules came in to effect in January 2020 and one of the changes introduced was to give legal standing to Joint Councils.

The Representation Rules state:

A scheme establishing a joint council can transfer all the property, rights, liabilities and functions of the individual PCCs to the joint council. If a scheme does that, the individual PCCs go into abeyance and no separate PCC meetings are held: the joint council does everything. Alternatively, a scheme establishing a joint council may transfer only certain property, rights, liabilities and functions – as specified in the scheme – of the individual PCCs to the joint council. If a scheme does that, the individual PCCs continue to function alongside the joint council, with the joint council exercising only the functions that are transferred to it and the other functions remaining with the individual PCCs.

Purpose of this paper:

The purpose of this paper is to provide a basis for discussion about the future governance arrangements of the Edgemoor Group and the potential for a Joint Council to be established.

It will be important that any new governance arrangements:

- Reduce substantially the load on the Team Rector who as chair of 11 PCCs, attends up to 44 PCC meetings as well as chairing 11 APCMs and three Churchwardens meetings every year.
- Reduce the repetitive administrative tasks repeated in each PCC and free up time for more important and specific matters for each parish.
- Reduces any potential for overlap and/or doubling up of responsibilities and tasks between a joint council and PCCs.
- Secure the agreement and support of PCCs
- Do not result in undue additional administrative demands on the Edgemoor Group administration function.

Three potential future governance options are set out below with respective benefits and dis-benefits.

Potential options for the future:

Option 1: Minimal change

Appointment of a deputy chair in each PCC and continue as at present with the Team Rector attending every other PCC meeting and in his absence delegating the chair to a deputy. The Team Rector would continue to direct the agenda and minutes would be circulated to him shortly afterwards to respond as necessary.

Benefits:

- The Team Rector would be released from attending up to 20 meetings
- Would not create any further administrative burden on the centre.
- Would suit PCCs who prefer the status quo.

Dis-benefits:

- Would not achieve any great savings of time and efforts, as the Team Rector would still need to direct the agendas, read through and respond to issues arising from the minutes.
- Would not help with PCC recruitment.
- Questionable whether this option would be a sustainable option for the future

Option 2: Creation of a Mission Community Council leading to a statutory Joint Council with specific and limited responsibilities

Creation initially of a Mission Community Council with specific responsibilities delegated to it by PCCs, leading after a pilot period to the establishment of a statutory Joint Council with specific and limited responsibilities delegated by PCCs. The Mission Community Council and Joint Council would most likely comprise specific members of the Ministry Team, Churchwardens and/or Treasurers and meet three times a year, replacing the current Churchwardens Meetings.

Potential tasks, which might be delegated to a Mission Community Council and Joint Council with specific responsibilities, might include: -

Initial phase: -

- Determining the future direction of the Mission
- Scheduling of services across the Edgemoor Group
- Single scheme for insurance of buildings and any licensing matters
- Representation and communication of Deanery Synod matters
- Preparation of a single annual report covering all parishes
- Faculty applications

Secondary phase: -

- Preparation of financial accounts

With both a Mission Community Council and Joint Council, care would need to be taken to ensure that the voices of all parishes, large and small, would be heard and taken into account in decision making.

Individual PCCs would continue with up to two meetings a year, one of which would be followed by the APCM. The APCM would be chaired by the Team Rector and any other meeting by an appointed deputy. Any day to day business could be conducted between PCC members after services. Responsibilities of Churchwardens would not be affected.

Benefits:

- Releases the Team Rector to focus more on Ministry
- Relieves PCCs of some of the time commitment and responsibilities, and allowing them to focus more on the church community. This may also assist in the recruitment of new PCC members

- Sharing of responsibilities may be piloted before committing to a formal scheme.
- Provides potentially an evolutionary approach from a voluntary to a statutory arrangement and as time goes on PCCs may choose to delegate more functions to the Joint Council or not as the case may be.
- This level of change may be more acceptable for PCCs
- Individual PCCs may choose to delegate to a Mission Community Council / Joint Council or not.
- Expertise may be shared e.g. a single person to write funding applications, or to apply for faculties etc.
- It may be possible to find volunteers with appropriate skills sets to assist the administrative function. If this is the case, the initial phase may be able to be managed within the existing administrative function.

Dis-benefits:

- Some additional demands on the central administrative function. This could be considerable if the preparation of financial accounts was centralised and might well require additional paid for resource.
- Some PCC members may be concerned that a Mission Community Council and / or Joint Council, albeit with limited functions, will not reflect properly the individual circumstances of an individual parish.
- Some disenfranchisement of PCC members who prefer the status quo
- Potential benefits would be diluted unless at least the majority of PCCs agreed to delegate to the Mission Community Council / Joint Council.

Option 3: The formation of a full Joint Council

The formation of a full Joint Council to which PCCs would delegate responsibility for all property, rights, liabilities and functions. It would be possible to establish a full Joint Council from the start, but it is more likely that this option could follow successful implementation of Option 2 in the longer term.

A full Joint Council would most likely comprise specified members of the Ministry Team and Church Wardens and/or other designated persons and meet four times a year with no separate Churchwarden’s meetings. Under this arrangement PCCs would go into abeyance and only meet once a year as part of the APCM, when they would be responsible for appointing any new Churchwardens and representatives for the Joint Council. The Team Rector would continue to chair parish APCMs. Any day to day business could be conducted after services.

Within a full joint council, care would need to be taken to ensure that the voices of all parishes, large and small, would be heard and taken into account in decision making.

Benefits:

- Considerably releases the Team Rector to focus on Ministry
- If individual churches choose to join, PCCs will go into abeyance and time will be freed up for members to concentrate on their church communities.
- Potential for a level of economies of scale where responsibilities and tasks are shared.
- Expertise may be shared e.g. a single person to write funding applications, or to apply for faculties etc.
- It may be possible to find volunteers with appropriate skills sets to assist the governance / administrative function.
- Individual PCCs may choose to join a joint council or not.

Dis-benefits:

- Considerable additional demands on the central administrative function.
- Some PCC members may be concerned that a joint council, albeit with limited functions, will not reflect the individual circumstances of an individual parish.
- PCC members may feel disenfranchised.
- Centralisation of the preparation of accounts may well require additional paid for resource. This may also disenfranchise Churchwardens and / or Treasurers.
- Not all PCCs may wish to delegate all their responsibilities and go into abeyance
- Potential benefits would be diluted unless at least the majority of PCCs agreed to delegate all their functions to a joint council.
- It would be difficult to accommodate a situation where some PCCs wished to move to a full joint council and others a joint council with specific / limited responsibilities.

Conclusion

Whatever your views, the days of a vicar serving in each parish are long gone. While the pressures faced have been building for some time, the Covid pandemic has brought the issue into sharper focus and is making us all think about how things might be better arranged.

Resources in the future are only likely to get tighter, and it is imperative that a new way of working is found which will free up the Team Rector to be able to focus more on developing and delivering the Mission and Ministry, and to sustain all our churches. Establishing a joint council, in limited or full form, may well be a means of achieving this. Greater sharing between parishes also has the potential, not only for economies of scale and expertise, but to relieve some of the responsibilities at local level to ease recruitment and so that church members might focus more on their church community and growing the church.

This paper is designed to initiate discussion across the Group about how the Group might best organise its governance arrangements in future. While there is often a natural resistance to change, particularly in anxious times such as this, change can also be a positive force and liberating too. Please consider this paper prayerfully.