

November 2024

Strategic Rural Deans FAQs

Q. Where is the money coming from? Who will pay for it?

A. The posts and support package for Strategic Rural Deans will be funded from diocesan reserves.

Q. Will this cost my parish money?

A. There will be no extra cost to parishes for the new Strategic Rural Dean posts, the House for Duty Assistant Curate posts, nor other elements of the support package for Strategic Rural Deans.

Currently PCCs expect to pay the expenses of their ministers. Similarly, if an Assistant Curate incurs costs (e.g. travelling to a Sunday service) we hope that the parishes will want to reimburse that expense in the usual way.

Q. Will we have to share a rural dean with other deaneries?

A. No, your Strategic Rural Dean will be for your deanery.

Q. Where we have full time Rural Deans or Deanery Lead in our Deanery Plan, does this mean the diocese will override us and make us do it their way?

A. No. The two deaneries that created roles of Rural Dean or Deanery Lead in their plans will continue to have those posts and those clergy will continue to offer the same leadership they do now, and with extra support. In both cases the posts have helped to shape the diocesan-wide approach.

Q. How is this new role different to what our rural dean does now?

A. Rural Deans have some statutory responsibilities as mentioned in Canon C23. There are also responsibilities linked with transitions when the Rural Dean acts (along with Churchwardens) as legal sequestrator of a benefice. These responsibilities will continue.

In addition, each Strategic Rural Dean will lead their deanery in the implementation of their plans towards the fruitful and sustainable future discerned in each place. They will work closely with clergy and lay leaders in their deanery, providing practical leadership, growing hope in the future, supporting decision making, overcoming blocks to plan-implementation and nurturing healthy cultures so that the vision and goals described in deanery plans become a reality.

Q. How is this different to the Deans of Area idea?

A. The previous plan considered appointing three Deans of Area, each with responsibilities for several deaneries. They were to take on the enhanced Rural Dean role and to be licensed as Assistant Curate but would not have had their own benefice in which they were incumbent. Having been unable to appoint to these roles we consulted further and with input from the current Rural Deans, devised this new Strategic Rural Dean approach.

Q. How does this new role help our Rural Dean?

A. There will be a significant package of support for those taking up the commission of Strategic Rural Dean; this is designed to make the role manageable and to help each person holding the commission to learn and develop their vocation. Hence the help is both practical in terms of carrying out the role and vocational in terms of enabling our own clergy to grow their gifts and skills and further explore their calling.

Q. You are struggling to appoint clergy, what makes you think you can recruit HfD for this or even rural deans?

A. We have had a significant year for appointments, recruiting in 10 more clergy than we might ordinarily expect to appoint in a period of two years. We also know that the national picture is challenging, particularly when it comes to HfD posts. Often these posts are less attractive than others because they are to incumbent-status (Vicar or Rector) or Priest in Charge (PinC) roles and the expectation is that the officer-holder will have all of the responsibilities of a PinC and fulfil those part-time.

The HfD posts we are seeking to fill do not require the appointee to be the PinC, but rather licenses them to be Assistant Curate, holding fewer legal and administrative responsibilities but able to take services, offer pastoral care, etc. to support the benefice of the Strategic Rural Dean and work with them as a colleague.

Q. How will this help us with our Deanery Plans?

A. A core objective of the role is to lead and enable the changes described in deanery plans, practically and culturally. This means that the Strategic Rural Deans will be there to support the changes in patterns of ministry, including by supporting stipendiary priests to make the transition to Oversight ministry, and encouraging the development of patterns of local ministry. They will also work to help deaneries engage in the priorities of the Diocesan Plan, including connecting with children and young people and serving those in need.

Strategic Rural Deans will also need to encourage parishes to work towards financial stability and to meet the costs of ministry identified in deanery plans, and they will provide signposting and resources to help clergy and other leaders to develop resilience, wellbeing and self-care.

Q. When will the new Strategic Rural Deans be appointed?

A. The role of Rural Dean is a commission (by gift of the bishop) rather than an appointment that people are licensed to. During the coming weeks both Archdeacons will be having conversations with the existing Rural Deans to discern which are going to step into the new role. In the case of the two deaneries with Rural Deans appointed as part of their deanery plans, those people will continue in post and will receive the same support as the others. In a few cases we will be seeking to make new incumbent/PinC appointments and invite those new clergy to take on the commission of Strategic Rural Dean.

Q. Will the new Strategic Rural Dean be the same person as the current Rural Dean?

A. In some cases, but not all. Some of our current Rural Deans took up the commission on the understanding that it was an interim measure and to help the deanery during a period of transition. Most Rural Dean 'commissions' are time limited, usually for three to five years.