

Proposal for an Alcester Minster Joint Council

For many years the Alcester Minster has had a Benefice Council made up of the churchwardens from each parish. This proposal would replace the Benefice Council with a more formally constituted Joint Council.

Where has this proposal come from?

Discussions about this have taken place over several years and have involved the PCCs of all of the parishes. The discussions have focussed on the need to replace the Benefice Council with a more capable structure and what the scope of a Joint Council's work should be.

How would the proposed joint council work?

The Joint Council would be made up of the rector, one other clergy person from the benefice chosen by the rector, and 2 representatives from each parish, chosen by that parish's PCC after the APCMs. While it will make sense in many cases for the churchwardens currently on the Benefice Council to continue, this creates flexibility if there are no wardens, or if someone else from the parish would be a better representative.

It would have the same legal status as a PCC, so would be able to own money and enter into contracts in its own name. This means that the Joint Council would be able to employ benefice staff. Its annual accounts would be presented along with the accounts of the relevant PCC at the APCM in each parish. These rules do not apply to the Benefice Council, which is a more informal body, so the Joint Council will be both more capable and more accountable.

The draft scheme gives the joint council the functions of overseeing benefice activities, co-ordinating joint purchasing, employing benefice staff, paying clergy expenses and overseeing safeguarding training and compliance across the benefice (the PCCs will still be responsible for complying with their own safeguarding policies). PCCs will also be able to delegate development of policies to the Joint Council. This will enable greater joint working in the benefice, while retaining the independence of the PCCs which will still be responsible for their finances, activities and church buildings.

What is the process?

A scheme for a Joint Council must be approved by a two-thirds majority at a parochial church meeting of each parish involved. While it is not legally necessary, the PCCs will be asked to recommend the scheme to their church before this, to give them a chance to scrutinise it. Finally it would need to be approved by the diocesan Bishop's Council, and would come into effect after that. The current Benefice Council has resolved that, if and when the Joint Council come into effect, the assets they manage for the benefice will be transferred to it.