

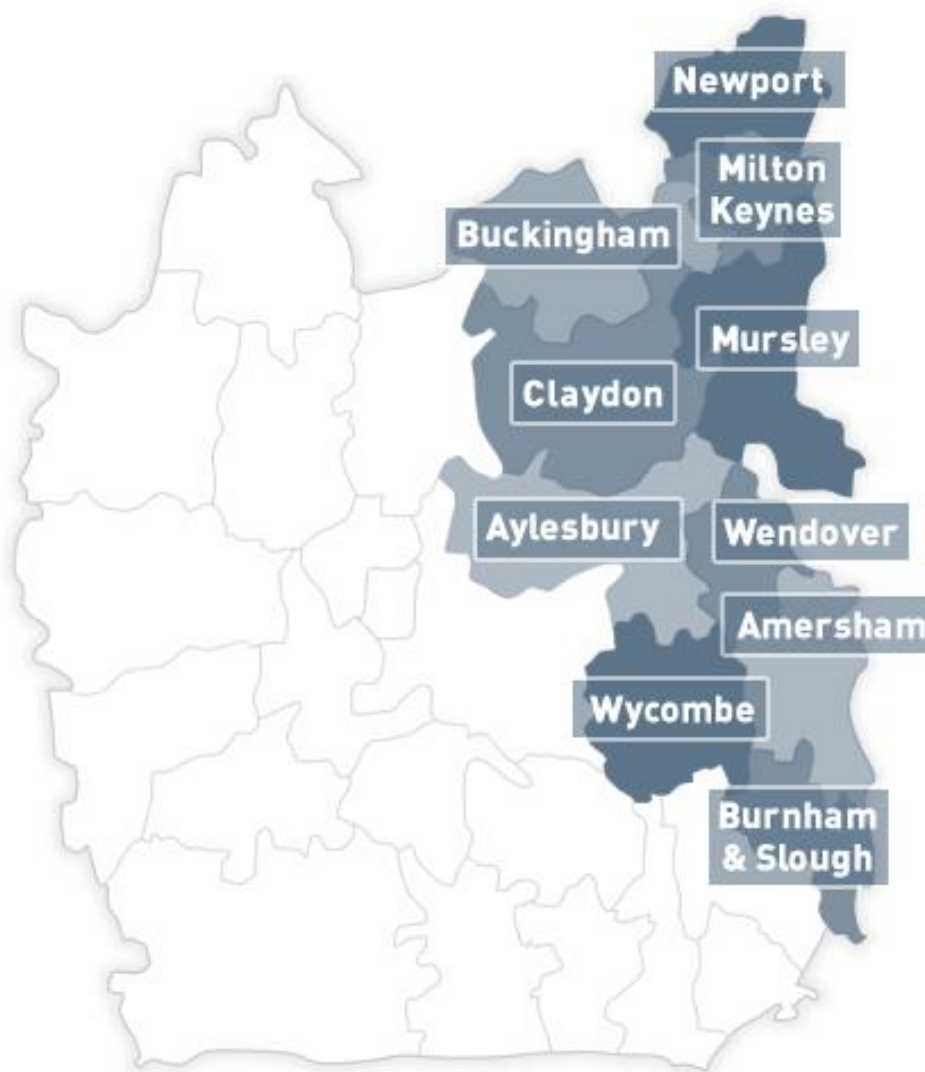


DIOCESE of OXFORD

A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world

Vacancy Guidelines

**for Churchwardens and PCCs
in the Buckingham Archdeaconry**



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PART 1—YOUR VICAR* IS LEAVING ...

Thank you for your valuable work as you support your church throughout the year.

When your priest announces s/he is moving it can come as a shock and there might initially be a sense of loss or bereavement. There will undoubtedly be challenges in the time of vacancy ahead. This can be a time of growth and hope too—with people working together and new people taking on responsibilities within the life and mission of the church.

We want you to feel supported and enabled throughout the vacancy. There is lots of help available. **This guide offers** the practical information needed by Churchwardens, PCCs and others taking responsibility in a vacancy, whatever the context. Alongside this, **your Bishop, Archdeacon or Associate Archdeacon, Parish Development Advisor, Area Dean and Deanery Lay Chair** will work closely with you throughout the vacancy. Please feel free to contact any of us (see Appendix B for contact details) if you have questions or concerns.

Praying and working together

Prayer takes on a new significance at a time of vacancy. You might want to use the following prayer in your church(es) during the vacancy. Perhaps use it as it is, adapt it, or write your own Vacancy Prayer. It can be used by individuals, groups and in worship.

*Gracious God, you are with us always.
We thank you for guiding us by your Spirit
through our life together as church.
[We thank you for the ministry of X,
and pray your blessing on her/him].
We pray that we may hear your voice in this time of vacancy;
give us patience, vision and courage as we seek a new priest
and as we become
a more Christ-like church, for the sake of God's world:
contemplative, compassionate and courageous.
In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

* We have used the words 'Vicar' or 'priest' in this document as a shorthand for all clergy vacancies (ie Rector/Team Rector/Vicar/Team Vicar/Priest-in-Charge/Associate Priest/House-for-Duty/Interim/etc.)

A vacancy can be a time of growth and development, creativity and pulling together. It gives an opportunity to share the load. Make the most of the opportunity to work together and involve as many people as possible in the life and mission of the church. You could invite church members, those on the church fringe and wider community to take responsibility for roles and tasks which may previously have been done by clergy.

Before your vicar leaves ...

It's important for the Churchwardens to hold a meeting with the outgoing vicar to talk through a number of issues. It might be helpful to include associate clergy and LLMs as part of this meeting.

At the meeting you will need to clarify handover of:

- Information.** The vicar often has information no-one else in the benefice knows. It is important to record as much information about the running of the benefice as possible. A 'Who does what ...' sheet can be helpful. Make sure the information is kept securely and that several people have access to it.
- Safeguarding and parish records.** Hand over all safeguarding paperwork, confidential files and parish records to be held securely during the vacancy. Clarify the location of parish registers, terriers, inventories, baptism and wedding certificates.
- Unfinished work.** The vicar will not be able to complete larger pieces of work before s/he leaves. It helps to clarify what stage each piece of work has reached and whether any further action needs to be taken during the vacancy.
- Pastoral care.** If the vicar has been working with a pastoral care team, any ongoing pastoral concerns can be shared with them. If the vicar has been doing much of the pastoral care personally, there might be highly sensitive issues that need to be passed on to the new incumbent. It's a good idea to designate a person to hold this information and pass it to the new vicar. If there are safeguarding concerns, these should be shared immediately with the benefice safeguarding officer.
- Finance.** The treasurer should ensure that all expenses owing to the vicar are paid up to date. If the vicar has been doing the fees administration for the parish, this should be handed over. If there is no Fees Treasurer, this is a good opportunity to appoint one.

Practical details, including:

- all keys
- reading the meters at the vicarage and sending the readings to the utility companies
- ensuring the vicarage is empty. (The parish pays to remove anything left behind.)

Who is responsible for what?

During a vacancy, the churchwardens and Area Dean become '**sequestrators**'. This means they are jointly responsible for the maintenance of services, parish fees and finances, care of the vicarage and preparation for the arrival of the new vicar. The Area Dean is a valuable resource during a vacancy and can answer questions and help solve practical issues.

It is **good practice** for a small group to help the churchwardens with **day to day management and care** of the parish (arranging rotas, pastoral care, worship provision etc.). This group is often drawn from members of the PCC. In parishes where there are Associate clergy, curates and/or LLMs, they should be included in this group. **Note:** this small group is responsible to the churchwardens and the PCC. Associate clergy, curates and LLMs will probably take on extra responsibilities, but an associate minister does not become Priest-in-charge in the vacancy. The churchwardens and PCC, with the Area Dean, are responsible for the benefice.

In a **Team Ministry**, the Team Rector holds legal responsibility during a vacancy and will normally organise the day to day running of the parish(es). If it is the Team Rector's post which is vacant, then the Team Vicar(s) will normally organise the day to day running of the parish(es), although legal responsibility is held by the churchwardens and Area Dean.

In a **multi-parish benefice**, it is **good practice** for the churchwardens of all the parishes to meet regularly to share information and encouragement and to work co-operatively where this is helpful (e.g. it may be sensible to rationalise the service pattern for the duration of the vacancy if it is proving hard to get cover). This may take the form of regular Benefice Council meetings, or other *ad hoc* gatherings. If the benefice has associate ministers, a curate and/or LLMs, it's **good practice** to include them in these meetings too.

PART 2—PARISH LIFE GOES ON: PRACTICAL INFORMATION

The life of the parish goes on. The services, pastoral needs, meetings, baptisms, weddings and funerals, and all sorts of other enquiries will continue. It may seem rather overwhelming, but with some thought and planning the churchwardens and PCC can ensure that everything runs smoothly during the vacancy.

PCC

As the chair of the PCC is the incumbent, the PCC should appoint a lay Vice-Chair. During a vacancy the lay Vice-Chair chairs PCC meetings. If your PCC is normally chaired by a lay person, they simply continue in this role.

The PCC continues to meet regularly to promote the whole mission of the church. An experienced Associate Priest or Self-Supporting Minister does not become Priest-in-charge in the vacancy and should not be invited to chair PCC meetings. You should ask the Area Dean to chair the Annual meeting(s) if one falls during the vacancy.

Your PCC meeting pattern is probably well established, but there may be a need for extra meetings during the vacancy so that everyone stays well informed and the parish's part in the process of making the new appointment can stay on track.

In a multi-parish benefice, regular contact between the different PCCs is important. This may take the form of regular wardens' meetings or more frequent Benefice Council meetings.

Further information about preparing for and conducting PCC meetings and annual meetings can be found in the Church Representation Rules (see Part II and Appendix II). This is available on line at <http://tinyurl.com/kzxa9m7>.

Sunday and midweek services

In a vacancy, the Churchwardens and Area Dean are jointly responsible for ensuring that regular services of worship take place and other aspects of the church's ministry are maintained.

- a. Before the vacancy begins, the churchwardens within the benefice should discuss with the Area Dean (and any assistant clergy and/or LLMs) the pattern of services, bearing in mind:
 - the needs of the parish/benefice
 - the availability of clergy and LLMs
 - the cost of providing the services
 - the pastoral considerations.
- b. It may not always be possible to provide a full pattern of services. If changes are necessary during the vacancy, the following guidelines are suggested:
 - Holy Communion should be celebrated each Sunday in every parish church, where this is the usual practice. In a **united benefice** or **plurality**, Holy Communion should be celebrated in at least one of the churches in the benefice.
 - If there is a regular well-attended service, every effort should be made to retain it at the usual time.
 - If it is not possible to offer a service of Holy Communion at its usual time, a similar service should be offered at an alternative time, such as a Sunday evening or on a weekday.
 - If no clergy are readily available, a service of Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer or A Service of the Word should, if possible, be led by those who are formally licensed to do so. The Area Dean will help whenever necessary to seek help from the other clergy or LLMs in the area.
- c. If none of these is available, Canon B11(4) allows for lay people to conduct Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. The permission does not include preaching. The Area Dean should be prepared to offer guidance regarding readings in place of a sermon, and arrange for the training of those leading. It is good practice to invite a small group of people to share in leading such services.
- d. If Holy Communion cannot be provided at the normal time, alternative provision should be made for Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer or A Service of the Word at the same time, as described above.

- e. Baptisms should normally take place during a regular service, or if this is impossible, immediately following a service. The priest leading the service should also be asked to perform the baptism, if appropriate.
- f. Mid-week services of Holy Communion may continue to be held in a vacancy if clergy are available to lead them. Arrangements for Home Communion for those who are ill are explained under Pastoral Care below.
- g. Questions about the pattern of services during the vacancy that cannot be settled by the Area Dean should be referred to the Bishop, or Archdeacon/Associate Archdeacon.

Parish policies: Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals

There should be policies in place in relation to issues such as baptism and marriage of divorced persons. The Churchwardens and PCC should be aware of these and they have a responsibility to maintain them as far as possible. **Parish policies** should not be changed during a vacancy. If there is doubt, consult with the Area Dean.

It is **good practice** to have a clear system and a **single point of contact for enquiries** about baptisms, weddings and funerals. If there is an associate minister or benefice administrator, s/he may take on this responsibility. This person's name and contact details should be given to local funeral directors. The Area Dean can give further advice and support in this area.

• **Baptisms**

There is no fee for baptisms. As a minimum, you need to ensure that all Godparents have been baptised. Make sure that a baptism certificate is given to parents, cards to Godparents, and the register is filled in. Any other enquiries should be referred to the Area Dean.

• **Weddings**

Fees are payable for weddings (see page ??). You need to be clear about your parish fee structure for weddings, including additional items such as organists, choir, flowers, bells. You will need to find a priest to officiate at any weddings which have already been booked. Because weddings involve legalities, including establishing a qualifying connection, calling of banns, and registration it is advisable to involve the Area Dean or to seek advice from the Registrar before booking any new weddings. It helps for one person to liaise with wedding couples.

- **Funerals**

Contact the local funeral directors so that they know that the parish is in a vacancy. If you have no associate clergy, the funeral director will normally ask someone from outside the parish to take the funeral, either at the crematorium or in church. If a funeral takes place in church, the parish often provides an organist. Fees are payable for funerals (see following section) and usually for additional services, such as an organist, too.

Finance, fees and expenses

In a vacancy, Churchwardens and the Area Dean are responsible for collecting fees and paying expenses. Fees should be recorded and remitted to the Diocese in the normal way (if you are uncertain about this, ask the vicar before s/he goes or ask the Area Dean).

- **Parish share**

The PCC should continue to pay its Parish Share as normal.

- **Funeral and wedding fees**

Fees are payable for weddings and funerals. If you do not have a fees treasurer, you should designate someone to be responsible for collecting the fees and making sure that those providing services such as music, bells, flowers etc. are paid. Information about the statutory fees structure for weddings and funerals is available from the diocesan website (www.oxford.anglican.org/support-services/finance/parochial-fees/). Local fees for additional services are set by the PCC. Visiting priests do not receive part of the fee unless they are retired and have Permission to Officiate. Retired priests may receive 2/3 of the minister's fee for conducting the service. The PCC should fully reimburse any expenses claimed by visiting or retired ministers conducting weddings or funerals.

- **Collections at funerals**

Although families do not have a right to hold collections for third-party charities at funerals, the custom is widespread. The family or undertaker must agree the appropriateness of any collection with the officiating minister, the Area Dean or the churchwardens before notice is given to the press and the service takes place. If the members of a family wish to pass on a donation personally, a cheque, made payable to the charity, may be sent to the appropriate family member.

All money collected in church that is to be given to the named charity, whether in sealed envelopes or not, should be recorded in and passed through the church accounts. Cash should not be handed over to the family or undertaker after the service.

Unless previously agreed otherwise by the family and the Officiating Minister, all money collected in church at the funeral should be sent to the nominated charity and the family informed of the amount that has been sent.

- **Fees and expenses for visiting ministers**

In a vacancy, the parish can claim payment of fees from the Diocese for visiting clergy taking Sunday services. The relevant forms, and general advice, may be obtained from the Payroll Officer at Church House on 01865 208204 or nicole.hayes@oxford.anglican.org

The expenses of any person who officiates at a service should be fully reimbursed by the PCC.

- **Expenses for pastoral care and parish ministry by visiting ministers**

The PCC is responsible for reimbursing in full the expenses of any ministers (associate clergy, LLMs, retired or visiting clergy) undertaking pastoral care and parish ministry. Ministers from outside the parish conducting marriages and funerals should receive from the PCC appropriate expenses unless they are reimbursed from elsewhere (e.g. by or through the funeral director in cases of funerals).

Pastoral care

Any clergy or licensed lay workers in the benefice will continue their pastoral work under the oversight of the Area Dean. The Bishop may agree that some pastoral duties be delegated to a retired clergyperson living in the parish or nearby. The Bishop will consult with the benefice and Diocesan Secretary about related financial issues before permission is given.

During the vacancy, provision should be made after consultation with the Area Dean for Holy Communion to be taken to anyone who is ill or infirm and also for pastoral care for those who are dying, and of other parishioners in urgent need. Pastoral visits will also be required for baptism and marriage preparation.

Communication and websites

It's important to ensure that people are well informed about parish life, particularly in a vacancy. Weekly pew sheets, monthly magazines and the parish website are all important ways of keeping people aware of the continuing life and mission of the church and how the vacancy and the appointment process are progressing. Make sure the parish/benefice website is completely up to date. Prospective candidates are likely to look at the website and it gives a poor impression if it contains out of date information.

The vicarage and grounds

In a vacancy, churchwardens and the property team at Church House Oxford are responsible for caring for the vicarage or rectory and its grounds, and any other benefice property. The usual practice is for vicarages to be let during a vacancy and the Archdeacon or Associate Archdeacon will discuss this with the churchwardens. Any questions about the house and its grounds should be directed to Tony Kerry and the property team at Church House Oxford (01865 208292 or tony.kerry@oxford.anglican.org).

Some practical points to remember while the house is empty:

- a Churchwarden should do a security check every week and ensure that the garden is kept tidy.
- the telephone number will only be kept if the PCC maintains the line rental and pays the bills during the vacancy.
- central heating should be left on a minimum setting. The property team will liaise with you about this.
- Electricity/gas and all service charges become the responsibility of the Diocesan Board of Finance. The energy provider should be advised that all correspondence must be in the name of "Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance, Church House Oxford, Kidlington, OX5 1GF."
- No part of the house, outbuildings or garden should be used by the parish unless previously agreed with the Archdeacon or Associate Archdeacon or the property team. This includes administrative equipment and work.
- The churchwardens should notify the property team immediately when anything occurs which might involve a claim under the insurance policy and if any repairs are required.

Church buildings and churchyards

- **Fabric.** In general, no repairs, decorations or alterations to the church or its fittings may be carried out without first obtaining a faculty. There are exceptions for certain minor works which are listed on the diocesan website, but please note that low cost is not itself a reason for being able to carry out work without a faculty. If there is any doubt, consult the Archdeacon or Associate Archdeacon.
- **Memorials.** Churchwardens are responsible for seeing that all proposed memorials to be erected in the churchyard are strictly in accordance with the diocesan regulations and authorised by the Area Dean. If there is any doubt, consult the Archdeacon or Associate Archdeacon.
- **Trees.** The Secretary of the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) for the Care of Churches or the Archdeacon should be consulted regarding trees.

Ecumenical relationships

Canons B43 & B44 (*Relations with other Churches, and of Local Ecumenical Projects*) need to be observed in the vacancy particularly regarding the duties which may be performed by non-Anglican Ministers during a Church of England service. Please consult the Area Dean or Archdeacon about any involvement of non-Anglican ministers, whether ordained or lay. It is not possible in law for a Minister of another denomination to preside at a Church of England's service of Holy Communion.

Parish archives

If it is intended to sort through and dispose of any parish archives (including recent correspondence files and administrative papers) churchwardens must first consult the archivist responsible for parish records in their area, who will be pleased to advise.

To Do List for the Vicarage/Rectory:

Contact the property team when the outgoing vicar has left the property	
Read the meters (electricity, gas, water)	
Visit the property each week (at different times/days for security)	
Ensure the grass is cut regularly	
Maintain the garden in a tidy state	
Arrange for someone to be present when the property is inspected by the property department	

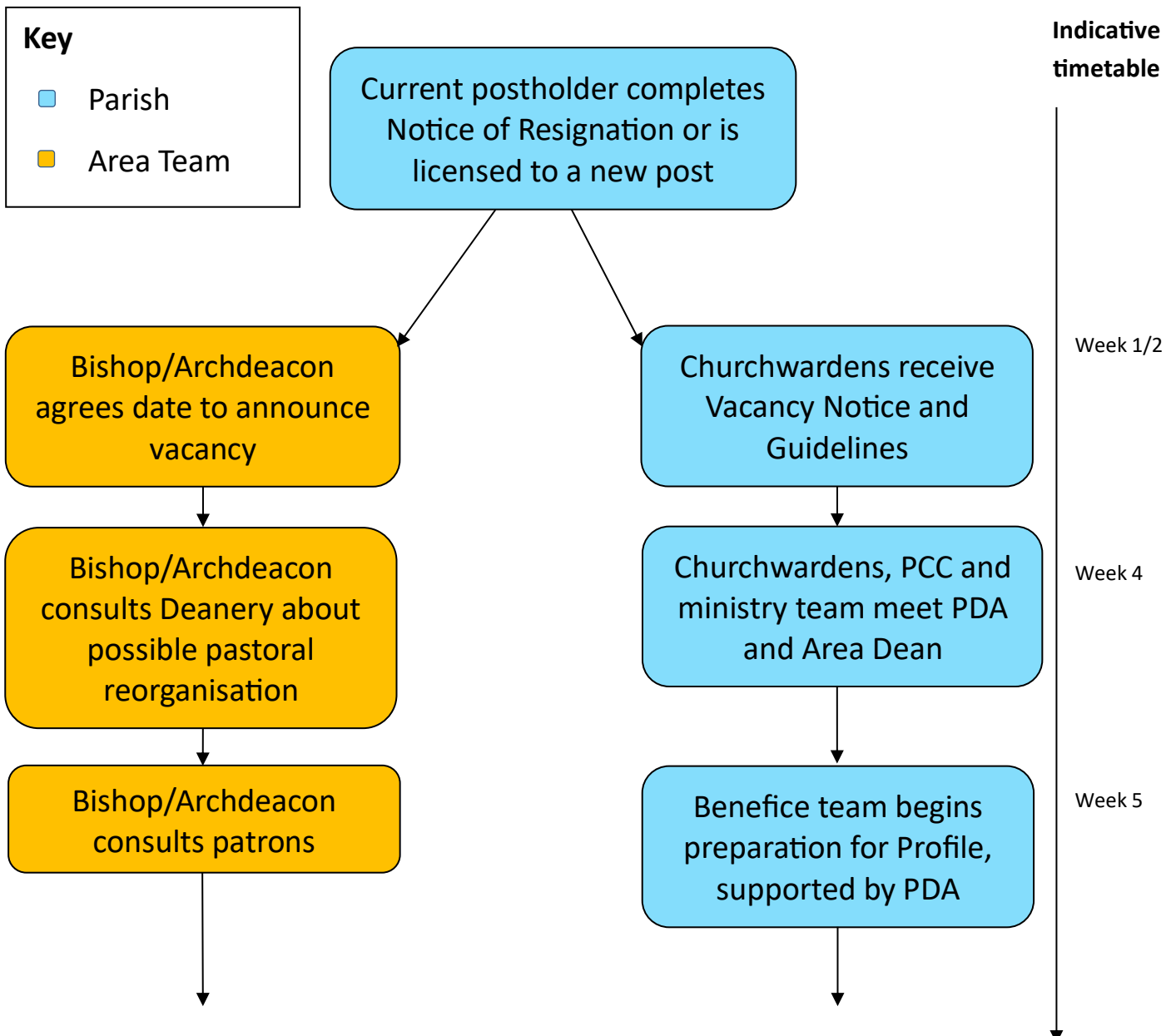
PART 3 - THE VACANCY PROCESS

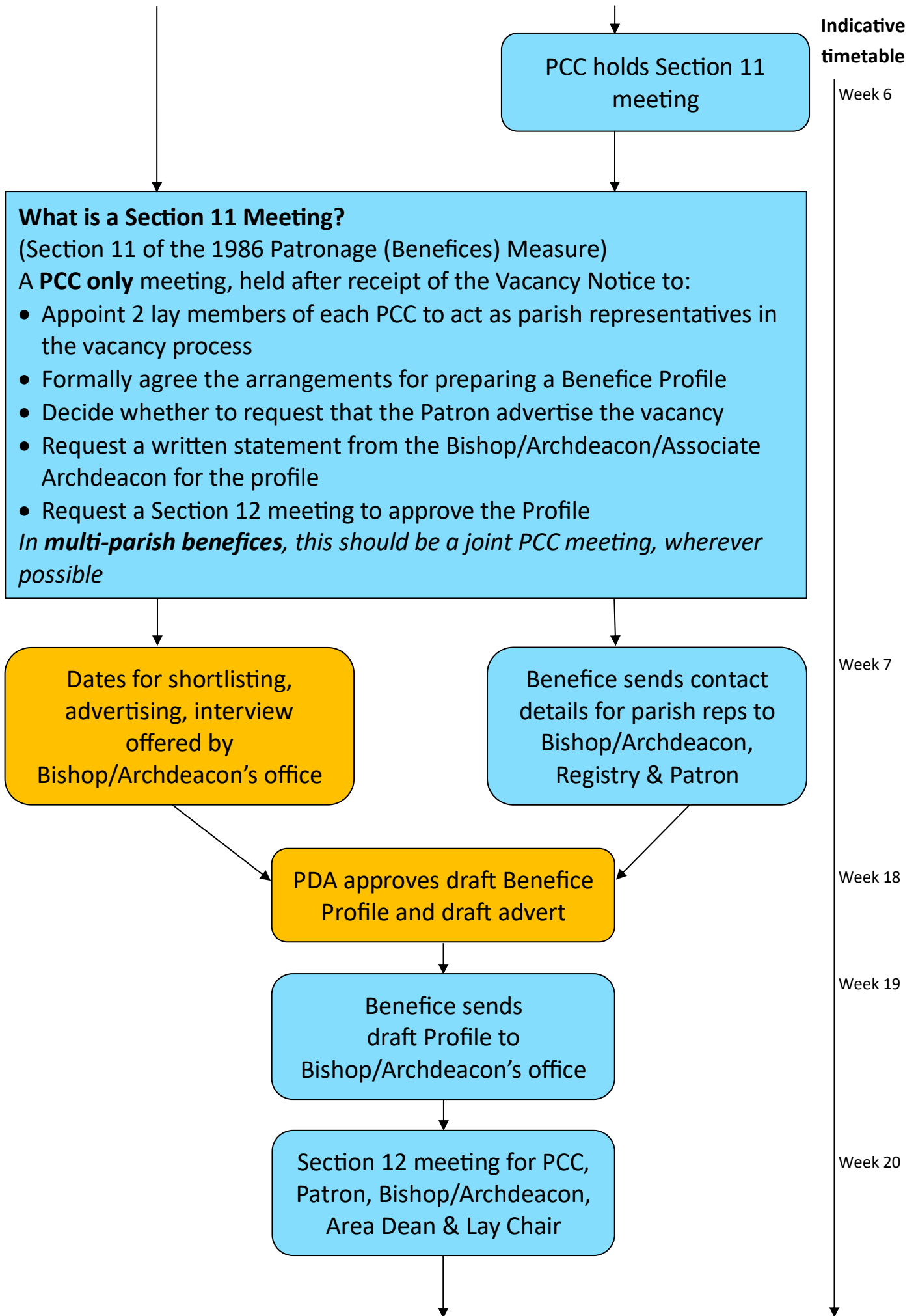
An Overview

Buckingham Area Clergy Vacancy Process

This diagram outlines the vacancy process. Each context is different, so this can be only a guide and there will be other things not included here, many of which will be carried out 'behind the scenes' by the Bishop's or Archdeacon's office. The PDA and Area Dean are your primary contacts to support and guide you through the details of the process as it applies in your context.

Where the diagram refers to 'Bishop/Archdeacon', the Bishop and Archdeacon will decide who will lead on your appointment. Once this decision is made the same person will work with you throughout the process.





What is a Section 12 Meeting?

(Section 12 of the 1986 Patronage (Benefices) Measure)

An open meeting in the benefice chaired by the Bishop/Archdeacon to:

- Formally approve the Benefice Profile
- Agree the draft advert
- Make practical and financial arrangements for the interview day(s).

Attendees should be:

- PCC
- Parish representatives
- Archdeacon/Associate Archdeacon/Bishop
- Patron
- Area Dean/Lay Chair
- PDA (if necessary)
- Any other interested parishioners

Week 20

Final amendments to Profile and advert before sign-off by Bishop/Archdeacon/Associate Archdeacon

Week 22

Advertising

....Week 24

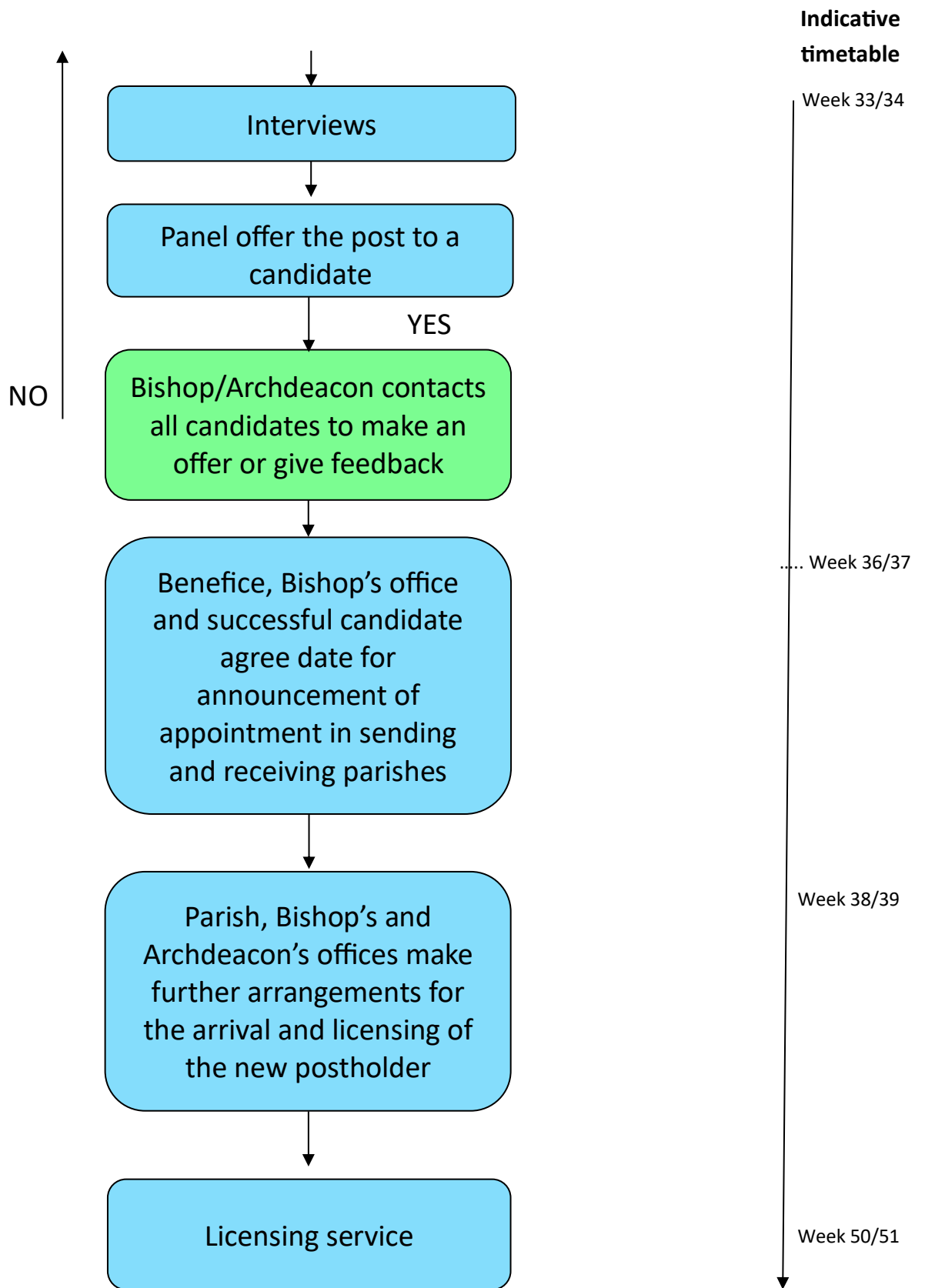
Applications received by Bishop's/Archdeacon's office

Closing date for applications. Candidates' paperwork circulated to shortlisting panel

....Week 28/29

Shortlisting meeting for Bishop/Archdeacon, Patron(s), Parish Reps and Area Dean/Lay Chair

....Week 30/31



The legal framework

The vacancy legally begins the day after your priest's formal retirement or licensing to a new post. If the vacancy is for the incumbent post, the churchwardens will receive a legal notice ('Vacancy Notice') from the Diocesan Registrar. This is part of the formal process of appointing a new incumbent, as set out in the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986 - the framework within which the whole process takes place. If you are unsure about whether this applies to you, your Parish Development Adviser will advise you.

Although certain things cannot happen until the legal start of the vacancy, as defined above, it is common practice to begin informal preparation for the process of appointment.

Who will be involved?

A number of people from outside the parish will be involved in the process of appointing your new vicar. Everyone involved will work together with you for the best outcome for the parish/benefice.

The following people will be involved in the process:

- **The Bishop or Archdeacon/Associate Archdeacon**

The Bishop or the Archdeacon/Associate Archdeacon of the area acts for the Bishop of Oxford in handling the legalities of the appointment. The decision to license the new vicar is made by the Bishop or Archdeacon/Associate Archdeacon, so s/he has to be happy with the person who is selected.

- **The Patrons**

The patrons are different for each parish. They 'present' the candidate to the Bishop. If you are unsure who your patrons are, your Parish Development Adviser can advise you. In a **multi-parish benefice**, there may be several patrons. The Bishop/Archdeacon will invite the patron(s) to be involved in the vacancy process

- **The Parish Representatives**

Normally there are two representatives (or one from each parish in a **multi-parish benefice** with four or more parishes) who are elected by the PCC(s) at the 'Section 11' meeting (see below). They will be involved in the selection process, acting on the basis of their own judgement on the views of the church. Individually at the interviews, they have a right of veto over any candidate.

Any PCC member can be a parish representative. In practice they are often, but by no means always, the Churchwardens. It is good practice to elect two people who represent different areas of the church's mission and ministry— and it can often be helpful to have one male and one female representative. In the case of a **multi-parish benefice** with four or more parishes, each parish can be represented by one Parish Representative, subject to the agreement of all the PCCs involved. This means the interview process does not become too unwieldy.

- **The Parish Development Advisor (PDA)**

The PDA will contact you early in the process to arrange a meeting to help you think about your needs and hopes for the future mission and ministry of the parish. The PDA will continue to work with you to help you shape these development discussions into an appropriate Parish/Benefice Profile (see below).

- **The Area Dean and Lay Chair**

The Area Dean shares legal responsibility with the churchwardens for the parish/benefice during the vacancy, and should be the first port of call for any problems. The Area Dean and/or Lay Chair will be involved in the shortlisting and interviewing to represent the deanery perspective.

Initial discussions

At an early stage, the Bishop or Archdeacon will:

- consult the Area Dean and Deanery Mission and Pastoral Committee to discuss any proposed changes to the current benefice structure. In the light of these discussions, the Bishop or Archdeacon might recommend that the benefice is suspended to allow for greater flexibility in planning future mission and ministry within the deanery. This means that the person appointed will be 'Priest-in-Charge', rather than Rector or Vicar. In practice, this makes little difference as the 'priest-in-charge' has the same functions as an incumbent. If there is a possibility that your benefice might be suspended, your Area Dean, Archdeacon or Bishop will explain this to you in more detail and answer any questions.
- check to see whether the parish/benefice has been paying its Parish Share in full. If this is not the case, further discussion will be needed before it is appropriate to reappoint to the post.

The Parish Profile

This is an important document – effectively the “shop window” of your parish/benefice. A good profile will greatly help potential candidates discern whether or not to apply for the post. The process of writing the profile will also enable your church(es) to reflect and discuss in detail about who you are, who God is calling you to be, and who you might need as a new priest to help you to move towards this calling.

The PDA will be in contact with you soon after your incumbent announces that s/he is leaving to support you through your discernment process and help you draft the key documents. It is good practice to plan some PCC meetings or an Away Day with the PDA to help you with this discernment process. It is also helpful to identify a small group who will work on the Parish/Benefice Profile together, and one member of that group who can be a key point of contact with the PDA.

Detailed guidance on preparing a Parish/Benefice Profile (*Guidelines for drawing up your parish profile*) will be provided by the PDA or is available at <https://bit.ly/3RXVH87> under the Vacancies section.

In outline, a good profile will:

- give a concise description of the life, mission and ministry of your church(es), congregation(s), community(ies), area, activities, services and so on
- clearly outline your strengths and opportunities for development
- express your hopes, aspirations, and vision for the future
- be clear and realistic about the qualities and characteristics you would like in your new priest
- provide a provisional Role Description for the new priest. This will be reviewed with the Archdeacon during the first 6-9 months of their post before it is signed off
- contain a section outlining the deanery perspective, provided by the Area Dean
- have a page about the Oxford Diocesan context, provided by the PDA
- possibly have foreword from the Bishop or Archdeacon

If you are in a **multi-parish benefice**, the PCCs are encouraged to agree to a joint wording of a Benefice Profile, which will include within it mini profiles for each of the parishes. It is good practice for a joint drafting group to work together on drafting a document which is acceptable to all parishes.

Timetable for the vacancy process

You should contact the Bishop's or Archdeacon's office as early as possible to agree dates for advertising, shortlisting and interviews. The PDA will advise on a realistic timetable. Normally all vacancies are advertised, so the timetable needs to allow time for adverts to be placed, applications to be returned to the Bishop's or Archdeacon's office, shortlisting to take place, interviews to be held, references to be checked, and once the successful candidate has agreed to take the job, for him/her to give notice in their current parish. The process is likely to take about 6 - 9 months.

Section 11 meeting

This refers to Section 11 of the 1986 Patronage (Benefices) Measure. The Section 11 meeting is usually short, as its purpose is formally to minute decisions which have usually been discussed and made informally in previous meetings. The Section 11 meeting could be held on the same evening as a regular PCC meeting (and minuted separately).

In a **multi-parish benefice**, it is good practice to hold a joint Section 11 meeting of all the PCCs to deal with the Section 11 agenda. Each PCC needs a quorum present at the meeting.

The Section 11 meeting agenda is typically structured as follows:

Attendees: PCC(s)

1. Prayer
2. Purpose and structure of the meeting: explained by the Lay Vice-Chair
3. Appointment of Parish Representatives: usually two lay members of each PCC. In a **multi-parish benefice** with four or more parishes, this is usually one person per PCC (see page 17). The appointed Parish Representatives will represent the interests of the parish(es) at the shortlisting meeting and on the appointment panel
4. Advertising the post: agree whether to request that the Patron(s) advertise the vacancy. The parish/benefice normally pays for advertising and the PDA will advise on the most appropriate advertising platform
5. Request a Vacancy (or Section 12) Meeting. See below for more information

6. Request a Foreword from the Bishop/Archdeacon describing the parish/benefice and the vacancy in relation to the wider area and diocese. The Foreword will be provided by the PDA
7. Formally agree arrangements for drawing up a Parish/Benefice Profile
8. Prayer

Vacancy (or Section 12) Meeting

This is a formal meeting chaired by the Bishop or Archdeacon, to which the Patron(s), Area Dean/Lay Chair, Parish Representatives and PCC members are invited. The meeting is open to all PCC members. Other people may attend the Vacancy meeting, if they wish. However, if a contentious issue requires a vote only PCC members and those involved in the formal vacancy process have a vote.

The Bishop/Archdeacon chairs and sets the agenda for this meeting. The agenda is typically structured as follows:

Attendees: Bishop/Archdeacon, Patron(s), PCC(s), Area Dean/Lay Chair

1. Prayer
2. Purpose and structure of the meeting (explanation by the Chair)
3. Parish Profile: final approval of the Parish Profile, Role Description and Person Specification. In practice, the discussion often results in minor amendments being suggested. The Bishop or Archdeacon will use this discussion to gain a better understanding of what is needed, and begin to discuss the structure of the interview day.
4. Interviews: discuss an outline structure for the interview day(s)
5. Advertising: agree arrangements and timescales for preparation of the advert
6. Dates: final agreement on dates for advertising, shortlisting, and interview.
Proposed dates should already have been agreed with the Bishop's/Archdeacon's office
7. Prayer

After the Vacancy (Section 12) meeting, any necessary small changes should be made to the Parish Profile or advert, as agreed at the meeting.

When these documents are finalised, they should be sent to the Bishop's or Archdeacon's office in electronic form so that they can be placed on the Diocesan website and the agreed advertising platforms. You may also like to put the profile on your Parish or Benefice website.

Advertising

In this diocese, it is normal to advertise all vacancies. Several advertising platforms are available, including Pathways Recruitment (online portal), the Church Times and other networks, such as New Wine. The parish normally pays for advertising. See Appendix A for guidance on drafting the advert. The Bishop or Archdeacon's office will approve the format, content and size of the advertisement before it is placed.

As part of the Profile and/or advert, you may wish to invite candidates to make informal visits to the Parish, either on a Sunday or midweek, in advance of the interviews. Such informal visits are normally at the candidates' own expense.

Shortlisting

The shortlisting group is normally the same as the interview panel. The group/panel is made up of: Bishop/Archdeacon (chair), the Parish Representatives, the Patron(s), and Area Dean and/or Lay Chair.

Some Patrons may want to work in a different way. If this is the case, the Bishop/Archdeacon will advise you. If you are part of a **Team Ministry**, the Pastoral Measure which created the Team may also specify others to be involved at this stage.

In normal circumstances, no more than five candidates are interviewed.

Questions to be used for the interviews are discussed and finalised at this shortlisting meeting. The scope of the questions will be based on the Parish/Benefice profile and they should enable the panel to explore candidates' ability to do the job specified in the role description. The Bishop/Archdeacon will advise on suitable questions for the interviews, taking into account the wider context of the benefice (eg church schools) and diocese.

The Bishop's/Archdeacon's office will invite shortlisted candidates to interview. The Parish should pay reasonable expenses for all interview candidates. This may include overnight accommodation for those travelling a long distance. (If a candidate is travelling from overseas, expenses are normally paid from the point of entry into the UK.)

Interviews

The interview day(s) are designed to be an opportunity for mutual exploration and discernment by everyone involved.

If there is a large number of people on the interview panel, the Bishop or Archdeacon may split them into two or more groups. The Bishop or Archdeacon will discuss with the panel the content of the interviews. Prayer and good preparation for interviews is essential.

The programme for the interview day(s) should allow candidates to meet a good number of people other than the interview panel. Please remember, however, that these are opportunities to meet candidates, not to conduct additional informal interviews.

You should consider:

- hosting a social event the evening before (or on the day of) the interview. Please remember not to overwhelm the candidates by inviting too many people to this event
- giving all members of the ministry team (curate, associate clergy, LLM, youth worker, administrator etc) an opportunity to meet the candidates. Although they do not play a formal part in the process, the Bishop or Archdeacon will consult them for their views and will not license someone with whom they feel they could not work
- involving several people in giving candidates guided tours around the benefice and house
- if there is a church school in the parish, involving the Head or other representative in the interview day

The Parish Representatives have the right individually to veto the appointment of any candidate.

All paperwork connected to the interview process should be regarded as strictly confidential and returned to the Bishop or Archdeacon at the end of the interview process.

Offering the post

The offer of the post is normally made by the Bishop or Archdeacon. If it is accepted, the offer is subject to a medical report, references, DBS clearance and a Safeguarding check. The Bishop/Archdeacon will contact all candidates after the decision has been made and offer appropriate feedback.

The identity of the successful candidate must be kept confidential until the official announcement is made. This is normally co-ordinated between sending and receiving parishes. When the announcement has been made in both parishes, details of the appointment should be made widely known.

Once the successful candidate has agreed to take the job, the usual period for him/her to give notice in their current parish is normally no less than 3 months.

PART 4—WELCOMING YOUR NEW PRIEST

Prayer and practical welcome

Although you will have been praying your way through the whole process, it is important to remember to pray for your new priest as they say goodbye to their previous parish and prepare to move. It can be a time of uncertainty and stress, and your continuing support through prayer and acts of practical kindness will be appreciated.

Alongside prayer, it's good practice to think of ways you might welcome your new priest and those close to her/him. These might include food in the kitchen on arrival, a welcome party, details of local doctors, dentists, shops, leisure facilities etc. Preparing to welcome your new priest in a warm, sensitive and hospitable way is time very well spent. The checklist opposite might be useful.

The vicarage

Any queries related to the house should be addressed to the Archdeacon. There may well be works to the house during the vacancy, and these will be organised by the properties department who will also have organised any letting of the house during the vacancy. The vicar-designate will probably need access in order to measure up for curtains, carpets etc. Although your new vicar will receive a re-settlement grant to help them pay for decoration and soft furnishings, it is unlikely to cover the full cost. Offers of help with decoration (in cash or in kind) are usually very well received and will make him or her feel welcome.

Licensing

Arrangements for the licensing service are the responsibility of the Area Dean and Churchwardens in consultation with the vicar-designate and the Bishop's office. There is an agreed form of service for the licensing of a new priest, and it is customary for the vicar-designate to choose the hymns. Invitations should be sent out as early as possible. The head teacher and chair of governors of any church school(s) should be involved in the welcome of a new incumbent. Licensing services are usually non-Eucharistic to ensure that those invited from the wider community (e.g. Councillors, Head teachers) do not feel excluded from part of the service. There is usually a party after the service. It's kind to consider the needs of people who may have travelled a long way to take part in the service.

Checklist for welcoming your new vicar

- Prepare a Who's Who of key people in the life of the church, with their contact details and responsibilities. Such as:
 - Organist(s) and/or the people responsible for the music in worship
 - Sacristan and/or the people who order candles, wafers etc and prepare the church for a communion
 - Someone who knows the story of the church well – its history, key people and events
 - People and/or organisations (in the church and the wider community) who exercise “power” or influence and the minister needs to meet sooner rather than later
 - Safeguarding officers for the benefice and the location of confidential Safeguarding records
 - Local undertakers, parish graveyards and crematoria
 - Local service providers eg doctors, local schools, police, plumbers, electricians, hospitals (especially the local A&D Department), nursing homes, residential care homes
- Arrange a meeting with the new vicar to:
 - go through and sign the Terrier, Log Book, Inventory and Churchyard plan and the Safeguarding arrangements
 - discuss benefice arrangements for data protection
- Hand over parish/benefice keys. (Note: It is good practice for the new vicar to sign a record of which keys are in his/her possession.)
- Arrange a meeting between the new vicar and the Treasurer to hand over financial information and records, such as parish finances, local Trusts, Discretionary and Charitable funds
- Provide a local map with some of the key facilities marked, eg residential/care homes, schools, supermarkets, petrol stations, pubs, restaurants or takeaways
- Provide a copy of the electoral roll, a list of wider church community contacts, last years annual report and key orders of service/service booklets

- Provide a list of names and contact details of recent and forthcoming baptisms, funerals or weddings. These should be recorded in the appropriate registers
- Arrange a handover meeting with the new vicar. The Bishop's/Archdeacon's office will send you a checklist of the information you need to hand over to your new vicar. You should also discuss:
 - any outstanding faculties or churchyard issues (either applications or work to be done)
 - current pastoral concerns that need to be shared
 - the "traditions" which are particularly important to your church
 - any unresolved conflicts or other human relationship dynamics that should be shared (including any "skeletons in the closet")
 - any other questions or issues the new vicar needs to know about the parish/benefice

And finally ...

Please be assured that everyone involved in this process wants the best outcome for the Parish, and they are all there to help and support you. Even if this is the first time that you have experienced a vacancy, don't be overawed by it. And above all, remember that this is God's church not ours, and if we continually and prayerfully seek his will, he will surely direct our paths.

Appendix A

Guidelines for writing the advert

It often helps to look at adverts you find in the Church Times (paper or website) or on the websites of other dioceses.

As you look at adverts from different sources and contexts, notice:

- which ones do you like and why
- which ones would you want to improve and why
- what kind of information people have included and what sort of format have they used

When you've done your research, you will need to liaise with the Archdeacon or the Bishop about the exact content of the advert, but the following may be helpful starting points:

- Remember the aim of the advert is to get people interested enough to send for further information. You don't need to tell them everything, but you do need to tell them enough, and it needs to be well worded and well presented
- Think about the key messages that your Parish Profile conveys, both about the nature of your parish/benefice and about the kind of person that you would like to be able to appoint. Make a list - bullet points are probably best - of no more than 5 things in each category that you would like to include in the advert
- Check with the Bishop's office or Archdeacon's office about practicalities, and agree closing dates and interview dates, so that these can be included. You will also need to tell people who to contact for further information - this is usually the Bishop's office
- Having gathered this information together, write a draft advert which can then be discussed with the Archdeacon or Bishop.

APPENDIX B: Useful Contacts

Bishop of Buckingham—The Rt Revd Alan Wilson

Tel: 01494 862 173

Email: bishopbucks@oxford.anglican.org

Catherine Green (Bishop's Personal Assistant)

Email: catherine.green@oxford.anglican.org

Archdeacon of Buckingham - The Ven Guy Elsmore

Tel: 01865 208266

Email: archdeacon.buckingham@oxford.anglican.org

Associate Archdeacon of Buckingham – The Revd Canon Chris Bull

Tel: 01865 208266

Email: christopher.bull@oxford.anglican.org

Heather Harris (Archdeacon and Associate Archdeacon's Personal Assistant)

Email: heather.harris@oxford.anglican.org

Parish Development Adviser - The Revd Gill Lovell

Tel: 07391 416089

Email: gill.lovell@oxford.anglican.org

Area Dean _____

Deanery Lay Chair _____

Space to record other useful contacts:

APPENDIX C: Further reading

'How to make Great Appointments in the Church' by Claire Pedrick & Su Blanch - published by SPCK

A useful book, written for people in your position and taking you through the whole process in more detail. It gives some helpful 'best practice' about the different stages.

Growing Through a Vacancy - a handbook: 15 practical steps to a healthy church vacancy by Bob Jackson - published by CPAS

Another good publication, based on thorough research of churches in vacancy, helping you to see a vacancy as an opportunity and to think about how it can be a positive time of growth within the life of the church.

See also www.grow-vacancy.org.uk and look under 'Supplementary material'

'Situation Vacant' - Grove Booklet, Pastoral Series P65 available from www.grovebooks.co.uk

Safeguarding

If you have any questions or concerns about safeguarding or DBS safeguarding checks please contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer on 01865 208290 or email: louise.whitehead@oxford.anglican.org

You can download the Diocesan policy on Safeguarding at www.oxford.anglican.org/mission-ministry/safeguarding/.

Mission and evangelism

The Parish Development Advisor, Gill Lovell, will be working with you closely to support you in the preparation of Parish/Benefice Profile so you should get to know her well. She will help you think through your mission priorities and use these to shape and inform your benefice/parish profile.

Churches and churchyards

Contact the Archdeacon.

A good website to visit is [http:// www.churchcare.co.uk/](http://www.churchcare.co.uk/). Remember, you need permission to change anything to your church fabric, fittings or furnishings!

Legal matters

Contact either the Archdeacon or the Diocesan Registry on 01865 297211 or sara.leader@wslaw.co.uk.

Money matters

Contact either the Archdeacon or John Orridge, Finance Director on 01865 208205 or john.orridge@oxford.anglican.org.

Parish buildings and land

If you have any questions about buildings or land owned by the PCC, contact Jane Darling on 01865 208248 or email: jane.darling@oxford.anglican.org.

Church buildings, Faculties etc

Contact Liz Kitch on 01865 208229 or email: liz.kitch@oxford.anglican.org