

Procedure for responding to clergy seeking to stay in post beyond the age of 70

In February 2017, General Synod introduced a change to the *Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Regulations*, the effect of which is to allow some clergy, under particular circumstances, to continue in post or to be appointed beyond the age of 70.

The new regulation requires bishops to have regard to the guidance issued by the Archbishops' Council. In addition to this guidance, the Archbishops' Council will issue further supporting material to which the bishop is *not* required to have regard by the Regulations, but which it is hoped may be found helpful.

It is clear that nationally it is *not* expected that agreeing to such requests should become the norm. Most clergy will continue to retire by age 70. The decision whether or not to allow a priest to serve beyond that age belongs to the bishop alone.

Nevertheless, it is this diocese's policy that those priests in good health who wish to extend their licensed ministry beyond the age of 70 should be enabled to do so, provided that it is in the interests of both diocese and parish.

Where an Area Bishop believes that it would be appropriate to agree to a request from a priest to be allowed to continue to exercise a ministry other than through PTO, the Area Bishop is now required to request a 'direction' from the Diocesan Bishop under Regulation 29A to that effect for a time-limited period.

Archdeacons will undertake the initial consultations and will establish four things:

1. ...that it is really in the interests of the parish and the diocese for the priest to continue in post. If there is any doubt about that the request must be refused,
2. ...that the churchwardens believe that it is in the interests of the parish,
3. ...that the PCC have given their agreement (and the priest concerned should not be present during that meeting),
4. ...and that there is every reason to believe that the priest in question will be capable of performing the duties of the office throughout the period for which they are likely to stay in office. The guidance suggests that an occupational health assessment will usually be the means by which the bishop establishes this, but in most cases it will be enough for the clergy in question to undergo a standard 55+ health check with their GP and to supply a letter from their GP confirming their fitness to work.

Steps 1-3 will not be necessary in the case of new appointments.

If the answer to all four points is 'yes', the Area Bishop will ask the Diocesan Bishop to make a direction under Regulation 29A. In the case of self-supporting ministry, the expected cut-off age will normally be 75. For stipendiary and house-for-duty clergy, directions will normally be made for two years at a time and not beyond age 75.