

DIOCESAN SYNOD

Title: **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: CITIZENS UK**

Sponsor: **BISHOP OF COLCHESTER**

Date: **18 JUNE 2016**

I. INTRODUCTION

Archbishop Justin says:

“My challenge... is to keep on responding to the challenge that God has been giving us, his people, for thousands of years: seek the blessing of the city, seek justice. Do this by making it possible for the Church to do something transformative in a thousand different places across the country. Build your networks and your relationships so that they weave together our Church and our communities. So that together we develop a new vision of the common good – of the welfare we share – that grows from the practical action of people. And that we don’t just let it stand as a vision, but we begin the process, little by little, of making it real. Of delivery, not just declaration. Because that is our calling.”

As a Diocese, we are committed to ensuring that our churches are places which serve the local community in order to be an effective Transforming Presence.

In the past, Dioceses sought to resource and coordinate the church’s social action through Boards or Councils for Social Responsibility and by the employment of Social Responsibility Officers or Advisors. Such councils tended to amass a vast potpourri of issues and initiatives which, when combined with the maintenance of relationships with regional and local government and other organisations, made the job of the officer or advisor nigh on impossible. This arrangement also ran the risk of contributing to a disconnect between the broader diocesan context and the many issues and initiatives that concerned people at a local or parochial context.

2. CITIZENS UK

Meanwhile, in the Diocese of Chelmsford, a new form of grass roots activity has been emerging through the work of Citizens UK. Citizens UK originated in East London as TELCO (The East London Community Organisers). Just over 20 years ago a number of community leaders including Anglicans in the Barking Episcopal Area, began to work together as members of civil society to seek what is now called a “Living Wage” for the least paid workers in their communities. They adopted the methodology of community organising, achieved success and began to roll out a nationwide campaign supported by the Mayor of London and other political leaders.

What is now “London Citizens” continue to focus on a living wage, but also refugee welcome, youth employment and affordable housing. These issues were the focus of the

London Citizens Mayoral Assembly on 28 April with 6,000 citizens at the Copper Box in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park Stratford, where the two main candidates for London Mayor, Zac Goldsmith and Sadiq Khan were asked to respond to London Citizens concerns and “asks” on these four issues. Church members in the Barking Episcopal Area were represented and involved. Bishop Peter, who has been involved with CUK for the past 6 years, is involved in the leadership campaigns on both the refugee welcome and affordable housing strategies.

For local parishes CUK provides accessible and effective training, especially for young leaders, in community organising, social action, power scenarios and general leadership skills. Currently in the Barking Area three parishes have benefited from such training in the past year: The Walthamstow Team Ministry, the Becontree South Team and St Margaret’s Ilford. The Plaistow Team Ministry (an original member) remains engaged also. This training has been financed through grants from The All Churches Trust and The London over the Border Fund. Down the years such training has been transformative for those involved and for the common good of their communities.

In Colchester, a number of community leaders are looking to create a new ‘chapter’ of Citizens UK and a steering group has been formed (chaired by the Bishop of Colchester). The local organiser (currently unpaid) has already organised a ‘Pledge Assembly’ on behalf of Syrian Refugees, an inter-faith gathering, a meeting of the faith leaders, a peace vigil and an act of remembrance.

The heart of community organising (as practised by Citizens UK) is the intentional building of relationships. Actions and Strategies are usually the product of thousands of one-to-one conversations, house groups and team meetings – many of them held in churches. Issues of common concern are identified and specific, realistic campaign targets are agreed. As Revd Dr Angus Ritchie (Director of the Contextual Theology Centre in East London) notes, “What makes community organising distinctive is that, after citizens have set their campaign targets, it is they who act to achieve change.”

At a TELCO general assembly some years ago, the opening address by the guest speaker, the Rt Revd Thomas McMahon (Roman Catholic Bishop of Brentwood), summarised the whole ethos of broad-based community organising: “It is better together... We are responsible together... We can bring more transformation in this world if we can do it together.”

3. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT WITH CITIZENS UK

We propose to continue to develop our relationship with Citizens UK and see what new opportunities can be created for links with other parishes in the Diocese. Therefore we ask Synod to consider the motion set out below.

4. MOTION

‘That this Synod commends the work of Citizens UK and asks the Bishop’s Council to explore ways in which the relationship of Citizens UK with churches in this diocese could be developed’