

The Diocese of Chelmsford



Deanery Lay Chair's Role Description – September 2025

Message from Bishop Guli

I am immensely grateful to all those who support the life of the Diocese of Chelmsford in many different ways, and most especially to those who are willing to serve as Lay Chair of their deanery. Your leadership continues to be crucial as we journey together through challenging times for the church and for the communities we seek to serve. Lay Chairs are an important and valuable part of our diocesan life. In partnership with their Area Dean, they form a vital two-way contact between parishes and deaneries and the wider leadership of the diocese. I do appreciate that this role adds an extra level of complexity into already busy lives and therefore encourage you to appoint an Assistant Lay Chair to support you (if you wish to) and to ask for any additional support you might need from your Area Dean, Archdeacon or Area Bishop.

May God richly bless you in your role as Deanery Lay Chair.

+ Guli Chelmsford

The role of the Deanery Lay Chair is to lead and unite the deanery, foster the well-being of the deanery's clergy and people, and develop the mission of the Church in the world. Underpinning this ministry are our diocesan values: [Travelling Well Together](#).

Lay Chairs will work closely with the Area Dean, Archdeacon, and Deanery Officers to provide active leadership, encouragement and support across the churches and communities of the deanery, regardless of their church tradition. They will seek to faithfully reflect the views, needs and hopes of the Deanery. With the Area Dean, the Lay Chair shares leadership in the deanery and in particular will encourage the effective contribution of the deanery's laity to the mission of the local church. The quality of the leadership of the Area Dean and the Lay Chair, acting together, will have a direct bearing on the effectiveness and morale of the local church and on its influence in the community as a whole. They are also in a key position to develop collaborative working with Deanery Officers and to strengthen partnerships of all kinds across the deanery and beyond.

The Lay Chair is elected by Deanery Synod to serve for three years (renewable). Deanery laity should endeavour to sponsor and elect the very best candidate available for what has become an important lay ministry role in deanery life. The role of Lay Chair holds a fine balance between representing the diocese to the deanery, and vice versa.

While the level of work involved in the role will vary across the year, it is estimated that the time commitment will be on average one day per week. Proper working expenses can be claimed from the Deanery Treasurer, and there may be some additional support available from the Deanery Secretary.

Deanery Lay Chair - Role Description

- The Lay Chair will meet regularly with the Area Dean, to consult, plan and consider jointly deanery matters, including mission and ministry, finance, administration and communication, involving the Standing Committee and its officers as necessary.
- Lay Chairs are encouraged to share in worship at all churches within their deanery, to get to know churchwardens and PCC officers and, by invitation, to meet with PCCs.
- They should participate in regular meetings with the Diocesan and Area Bishop, Archdeacons and Diocesan Secretary to explain and interpret diocesan policy in local terms and represent local needs in the diocesan planning processes. They should ensure that their deanery is fully briefed at all times about the development of diocesan policy and practice.
- They should encourage collaboration of all kinds, including ecumenical relationships and partnerships with civic authorities and community organisations.
- The Lay Chair will assist the Archdeacon(s) with the annual Visitation and Admission of Churchwardens (if requested), and with the visitation of parishes under the Inspection of Churches Measure, working closely with the local churchwardens.
- The Lay Chair plays an important role in vacancies and, together with the Area Dean, should prepare for, and be pastorally diligent during, vacancy periods when parishes and their officers value support and advice.
- The Lay Chair shares with the Area Dean in the joint chairing of **Deanery Synod**, and with the Area Dean and Standing Committee, sets each Deanery Synod agenda.

- The Lay Chair is ex officio Chair of the Deanery House of Laity and acts as returning officer for the election of clergy representatives to the Diocesan Synod. (S)he may call occasional Deanery House of Laity meetings.
- The Lay Chair will ensure that, in Deanery Synod, matters referred to it from Diocesan and General Synod are considered; and may propose motions to be considered by Diocesan and General Synod.
- Lay Chairs are full members of the Area Mission and Pastoral Committee, informing decisions made in those meetings or making recommendations to the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, whilst managing any conflicts of interest arising from their membership of both, which they may, from time to time, have in accordance with the CDBF Conflicts of Interest policy.
- Lay Chairs are encouraged to attend meetings of the LMDC Charity.
- Lay Chairs assist the Deanery Treasurer and Standing Committee in maximising Parish Share achievement, communicating the financial facts of Church life to parishes within the deanery.

Induction and support

The Area Dean plays a key role in introducing a new Lay Chair to the Deanery Synod and to deanery church leaders. Wherever possible a good handover of responsibilities should be arranged with an outgoing Lay Chair. If desired, a Lay Chair can receive the support of an experienced Lay Chair as mentor. S/he is always able to seek help and advice from the Archdeacon and the Lay Chair of Diocesan Synod as well as other Area colleagues. The Diocesan Registrar can provide guidance on a range of legal issues.

Term limits

From 1 July 2023 the new rules for Deanery Synods state that someone may not serve as Lay Chair for longer than two triennia (i.e. six years). There is provision for exceptions to be made by the House of Laity of the Deanery Synod. There is no list of acceptable grounds to make an exception, but it may be that there is an important piece of work within the Deanery where it would be prudent for the current Lay Chair to continue. This limit does not take into account terms served prior to the 2023 triennium commencing. It also does not include partially completed terms where someone has been elected to a casual vacancy.

Deanery Synod and Deanery Standing Committee

The Church of England is episcopally led and synodically governed. Currently the Deanery Synod is the intermediate unit of leadership and governance between parishes and the diocese. Deanery Synod has a concern for the whole mission of the Church – pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. It meets several times annually as business and topical concerns demand, and its composition and procedures are arranged according to the *Church Representation Rules*.

The Deanery Standing Committee also acts as the deanery Mission and Pastoral Committee and has a key responsibility for shaping deanery policy and the Deanery Vision and Plan. It advises parishes and diocesan leadership about pastoral reorganisation, Parish Share and Mission Opportunity Fund grant applications. It comprises the deanery officers ex-officio and a number of clergy and lay members as provided by Church Representation Rules and

deanery custom. It should have a concern for succession planning for key deanery leadership roles.

Appendix: key relationships

Assistant Lay Chair: newly created under the 2023 Deanery Synod Rules is the role of the Assistant Lay Chair. There is no obligation to appoint someone to this role. However, if the House of Laity does appoint to this role it could be an important source of support for the Lay Chair as well as providing some continuity when new Lay Chairs start in post. Not every Assistant will want to serve as Lay Chair, but this role could also be used as an opportunity to train a future Lay Chair for the Deanery.

The Area Dean: appointed by the Diocesan Bishop from amongst the deanery clergy. The appointment is made following consultation with the Deanery clergy and Lay officers of the Deanery Synod, the Archdeacon and Area Bishop. An appointment is usually for a period of five years but this can be renewed following further consultation.

Deanery Treasurer: plays a key role working alongside the Area Dean and Lay Chair in the co-ordination of the Parish Share scheme in the deanery, supporting parishes in discussions to apportion parish share in order that the total requested parish share contribution for the deanery is met. They are often expected to assist parish treasurers with best practice and expected to join in with meetings that may be arranged by Diocesan Office colleagues when diocesan budget and Parish Share issues are explained and discussed

Deanery Secretary: provides the Deanery Synod and Standing Committee with administrative support including the notification of meetings, circulating papers, minute taking and record- keeping. The Secretary is the recipient and disseminator of some diocesan communications. The role may be developed locally according to need.

Deanery Chapter: is a mutually supportive meeting for licensed clergy in the deanery and should not be confused with synodical gatherings of the Deanery House of Clergy. Regular meetings will naturally develop their local character and will typically include worship and theological reflection, business and social dimensions. The Lay Chair may receive an occasional invitation to meet with the Chapter.

Archdeacons: will often meet with Lay Chairs alongside the Area Deans. They are always available for advice and support if required.

Further Information

The National Deaneries Network provides helpful news, briefings, resources and a bi-annual Conference. www.nationaldeaneries.net.

Additional information can be found at

[Canons of the Church of England | The Church of England](#)

[Church Representation Rules | The Church of England](#)

The Churchwardens Measure 2001 [Church Representation Rules online - supplementary material | The Church of England](#)