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COMMON TENURE

By David Phillips

After years of talking about it the new Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Measure is nearly upon us. It represents a significant change in the way ministry is conceived of in the Church of England though the reality of this is only going to become clear slowly. The legislation is already in force but its main provisions will only take effect from 31 January 2011.

The most significant immediate change is that about one half of all clergy will automatically transfer to Common Tenure by 28 February. Less dramatically all incumbents will have the option of transferring to Common Tenure (an article on this was published in issue 113 – Summer 2009). More significantly in the long term all new appointments will be on Common Tenure and it is this which concerns this present article.

Clergy will still be appointed as Priest-in-Charge. At one stage in the process it was said that this would not happen and some of us foolishly believed the assurances, but apparently we were wrong to do so. Where pastoral re-organisation is required benefices will still be suspended and a Priest-in-Charge appointed, on Common Tenure. The new legislation should ensure that these appointments are handled more fairly but only time will tell.

There will also be situations where it is not now possible to appoint an incumbent, in particular when someone holds a part-time parish post and alongside this some other post. At present they are appointed Priest-in-Charge but under the new legislation they can be appointed as incumbent for as long as they hold the other post.

Appointing Incumbents

What difference will the new legislation make to the appointment of an incumbent? At one level very little because the legislation governing such an appointment is largely unchanged. The only new mandatory requirement is for a Statement of Particulars to be produced. For full-time incumbent posts this is going to be virtually identical for all posts, except for subtle differences between Dioceses. The other documents anticipated by the new legislation are not mandatory, that is a Job Description and Person Specification, though they are almost essential for the smooth operation of the new Capability procedure.

At present many parish profiles include both a Job Description and a Person Specification though it is debatable whether these are properly speaking part of the profile. Nevertheless, where a PCC has the competence to produce such documents they should do so. This will require some further homework to discover what the documents should contain and what should and should not be said in them. They will not be the same as those used in other jobs since clergy are not employed, they are office holders, but the basic principles are similar and many PCCs will have members who are familiar with what is needed or can work it out from the guidance and models provided (see www.common tenure.org). One advantage of this is that PCCs will discover that what they are imagining in a post is completely unachievable and a degree of realism may enter in.

Others, however, are anticipating that an Archdeacon will produce the Job Description and Person Specification after they have read the profile. This will significantly delay the process of the appointment since it can only happen after the PCC have agreed the profile. Some PCCs seem incapable of putting together a decent profile and will need help, but to get the Archdeacon to do it in all cases is unnecessary and wasteful.

The particular concern of some PCCs will be that the drawing up of these documents will shift the focus significantly away from what the PCC is looking for and towards what the Archdeacon thinks they need. This sort of thing often happens in the way adverts are drawn up which again, because they are being paid for by the PCC, should be agreed by the PCC.

If the PCC produces the documents, and I hope they will, then there may well be need to discuss some details in them. This can easily be done in the “Section 12” meeting, which are now quite common and under the current legislation provide an opportunity to discuss the profile. It should be remembered however that the final form of the profile is up to the PCC.

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