

Towards an admin/ops hub for Swindon Deanery?

The question has been raised as to whether Swindon Deanery should develop an ops/admin support hub, with the emphasis not on routine parish administration such as rotas, notices or service sheets, but on wider operational support around compliance, governance and parish resilience.

After a conversation at a recent Chapter meeting, Adrian consulted with Dave Brae Area dean of Kingsdown and South Glos Deanery, and Liz Evans who is employed do the ops hub role. This is a summary of those conversations:

The initial **Swindon Chapter conversation** identified a need for someone who understands Church of England and diocesan processes and can help parishes navigate areas such as policies, safer recruitment, safeguarding, HR, health and safety, faculties, grant applications and other compliance-related responsibilities.

The role being imagined for Swindon feels more like an operations manager than a traditional administrator: someone who could oversee key processes across a range of parish contexts and help ensure churches are supported before problems become urgent.

The South Glos & Kingswood deanery model is the main comparison point. Their deanery is described as healthy, supportive and varied, with a mix of church types in a mostly suburban setting with some rural context.

In South Glos & Kingswood, the role emerged from conversations with clergy about their greatest needs and pressure points. Two major areas stood out: **buildings and safeguarding**.

On **buildings**, the South Glos model focuses on helping churches maintain and repair buildings, identify and apply for grants, and think more strategically about how church buildings can be used for community purposes and income generation.

On **safeguarding**, the model supports parishes with policies, DBS administration, training administration, processes and accurate record keeping.

The South Glos hub also provides **deanery administration** and support to the Area Dean, though the more significant value appears to come from targeted operational support to parishes.

The formal South Glos role was initially set up as a **fixed-term post**, funded by TCT, with an ambition that it would become financially self-sustaining over time. The current postholder works 25 hours per week, although 10 of those hours are dedicated to admin support at St Chad's, where David Brae is incumbent and Area Dean.

The **role description** in South Glos focuses on four priorities: grant finding and writing, helping churches develop business plans for community partnerships and building income, safeguarding support, and building strong links with Hillside House so the deanery can access diocesan support services more effectively.

The current postholder Liz Evans' experience suggests that, in practice, the role is mainly focused on **safeguarding and grants**, with less demand so far for governance support. However, she believes governance help could become more useful as parishes prepare for inspections or reviews.

A distinctive feature of the South Glos model is its **proactive approach**. Liz has access to deanery safeguarding dashboards, spots when parishes are falling behind, and contacts them to offer help rather than waiting for them to ask.

Liz describes much of the role as **coaching and reassurance**: helping parishes understand what is needed, speaking in accessible language, and walking alongside them rather than simply doing tasks for them.

A **key insight is that diocesan support already exists** and is often strong, but parishes may not know how to access it, may not feel confident approaching the Diocese, or may seek help too late. The hub role helps bridge that gap.

The **effectiveness of the South Glos model seems to depend heavily on the relationship between the Area Dean and the hub worker**. David Brae often identifies parishes that need support and asks Liz to make contact, making the role targeted, relational and proactive.

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18th June 2026

Questions for chapter to Consider:

- **What are the insights from Kingswood and South Gloucestershire Deanery that are most relevant to our situation in Swindon?**
- **What are the key areas that a potential post could significantly and effectively support in our deanery, if any?**
- **Is there merit in pursuing this further in Swindon Deanery (a) if external funding became available and (b) if no external funding is available, and why?**

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