

Annual Report: Iain Ambler – IT Manager

The ultimate aim of any IT department is to enable its users to “work smarter, not harder” - and that is certainly what I aspire to bring to my colleagues at the Diocese.

During 2017 a number of projects enabled people to further take that smart approach, building on the cloud infrastructure first introduced in 2015. We introduced the National Church’s Contact Management System (CMS) which replaced the ageing database which had minimal support and no future development.

There are a number of additional developments planned for the future, and with over half the Dioceses of the C of E on board already, costs and ideas are shared between us. The Online Faculty System went live in February 2017, and is greatly assisting the DAC in managing faculty applications. The contract for the copier/printers we use in the Diocesan Office was reviewed and we renewed it with our existing supplier on considerably better terms. This, combined with print management software is expected to yield a significant reduction in printing costs.

The remit of IT also extends beyond hardware and infrastructure and into the realm of data management. The Deployment Database was implemented in 2017 and will form a key part of the discernment process that Area Deans and Archdeacons will need to take as they grapple with the complex issues of clergy deployment.

Looking ahead to 2018 there is also much to do to further improve and streamline our IT systems. Following the approval in late 2017 by Bishop’s Council, Propman - a property management database - has been installed and, at the time of writing, is in the process of configuration and testing prior to going live.

When this has bedded in fully, Propman will remove a lot of the administrative burden for the Diocesan Surveyor and his team, and will give them the ability to do far more when they are out visiting properties rather than waiting until they are back at their desks. Propman will also have a reporting link into the accounts system we use, which will eliminate some administrative processes for the Finance Team, too.

The accounts system will be upgraded to the latest version, which will enable additional process and report automation, significantly reducing the time spent manually managing data with spreadsheets.

I am grateful to Bishop’s Council for approving the upgrade of our telephone system at their February meeting. The current telephone system is over ten years old and is at a point where it is now showing its age. The replacement system is more modular in its design which gives enormous flexibility for the future as well as purpose for today, and it will bring immediate benefits to all staff when the first installation phase is completed.

During the last couple of years I have ensured that all staff have had their hardware updated to be fit for purpose. In order to maintain this position, a rolling programme to replace older hardware is now incorporated into the IT budget with the aim to replace PCs and laptops before they reach the end of their serviceable life.

A number of contracts are due for renewal this year, which include various internet connections for the Diocesan Office and Archdeacons and our cloud infrastructure. I will be looking at the options open to us with this as there is scope for some rationalisation and further integration. This may yield some cost savings, but I will be primarily reviewing this

within the context of our shared vision and strategic framework, Called Together, ensuring that our infrastructure can also meet the vision and the strategic priorities that arise.

Also within that context, I expect to be spending more time working to provide data and statistics to assist in that strategic planning and thinking. It is unlikely to be a dull year ahead!

Information and Communications Technology is an important part of our mission and ministry: it brings connection, facilitates relationship and fosters sharing – and enables much of what we need to do as a Diocese to happen. I am delighted to play my part in the ministry of ICT - and look forward to serving the Diocese through 2018 and beyond.