

**Cambridge Judge Business School**

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets  
for the Common Good

# GOVERNANCE OF CHURCH BUILDINGS





## INTRODUCTION

The governance of church buildings (as opposed to ecclesiastical parishes) can fall under two basic headings: ecclesiastical and secular. Until recently the two were kept quite separate, with open churches being governed under the strict models of the Church Representation Rules, and closed churches being managed, and often owned, by secular charitable trusts, or private, commercial or educational bodies.

In recent times some key changes have taken place in legislation which have enabled new models of governance to emerge, often blending the ecclesiastical and secular models, and reducing the need for a church to be closed in order for secular bodies and individuals to become involved in their management. It is tempting to view church governance from a top-down perspective, where churches are made to fit into a streamlined and efficient new management structure based around deaneries and ever-larger benefices. However, the Church of England remains based around the system of parishes, and many parishes thrive with the independence this brings. Other parishes struggle, with recruitment of PCC members, with developing their worship, and with caring for their church buildings.

In looking for new governance structures it is important to remain flexible to the needs, strengths and weaknesses of each particular parish, while seeking to avoid un-necessary complexity and administrative burden. This paper briefly explains what is possible, and proposes some different models for managing church buildings.

# CHURCH REPRESENTATION RULES 2020

The Church Representation Rules were published in a considerably revised form at the beginning of 2020, and provide for a number of options for PCCs to consider.

- **Joint Councils**

It is now possible for two or more churches within a benefice or group ministry to formally join together, forming a joint council, acting as a PCC for two or more parishes in the benefice. This helps to pool resources and individuals to work together.

It is also possible for the joint council model to be scaled up so there is a single council acting as the PCC for all the churches in a benefice or group ministry, where all PCCs wish to do that.

- **Variations on the model PCC**

The 2020 Rules, just like their predecessors, set down a model for the management of a PCC, prescribing who may be a member, how they must be elected, and all the details of how the PCC should be operated. However, the 2020 rules also permit individual PCCs (and joint councils), with the consent of Bishop's Council, to vary the model to suit their own situation. For example, it is now possible for a PCC (or joint council) to vary its model to admit non-communicants to full membership of the PCC.

## LOCAL ACTION AND FRIENDS GROUPS, AND TRUSTS

Church "friends groups" have been around for many years. Increasingly, these bodies are becoming directly involved in the day-to-day management of church buildings, and the Church Representation Rules facilitate this.

It is possible for a PCC or a joint council representing several parishes to appoint local sub-committees in those places where there are villagers wishing to help with running the church building, but who do not wish to serve on a PCC/joint council. It is also possible for a single committee to be appointed as a sub-committee to run more than one church.

In some places it has become difficult to recruit either a PCC or a friends group to look after the church. In the past these churches would have been closed and either converted to a new use or vested with the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) for their care and maintenance. That is no longer an easy option, particularly with highly listed churches, which can be unsuitable for conversion, while CCT has only limited capacity to take on new churches.

However, there is potential for local buildings preservation or other trusts to help look after church buildings, be that at parish, benefice, deanery level or more widely. Currently there are few such trusts on the ground, but if it becomes apparent that a number of church buildings have no future other than in the care of a trust, that will change. In situations where a suitable trust is able to take a role in caring for a church building, it is possible for the incumbent and PCC/joint council to formalise this arrangement through granting a lease.

Whether the sub-committee or trust model is most appropriate will depend on the local situation, whether trustees can be found, and whether individuals are willing to serve as sub-committee members, or prefer the independence (and responsibility) of being a separate trust.

## FESTIVAL CHURCHES

*Festival Church* is a term that first came to prominence in 2015. It refers to church buildings which cease to hold weekly services and instead concentrate on holding festival services at least six times a year – doing fewer services, better. The term “festival service” is flexible, referring not only to the traditional church festivals, but also to community-focussed events centred around an act of worship.

The governance of a festival church can follow any of the models set out above, but it makes sense to follow whichever model enables the widest local participation in the care of the building, and this will vary from place to place. Most churches cared for by friends groups or separate trusts will come broadly under the Festival heading, as long as they remain open for worship and hold occasional services.

The development of the festival church model is supported by the Association of Festival Churches.

# HUB CHURCHES

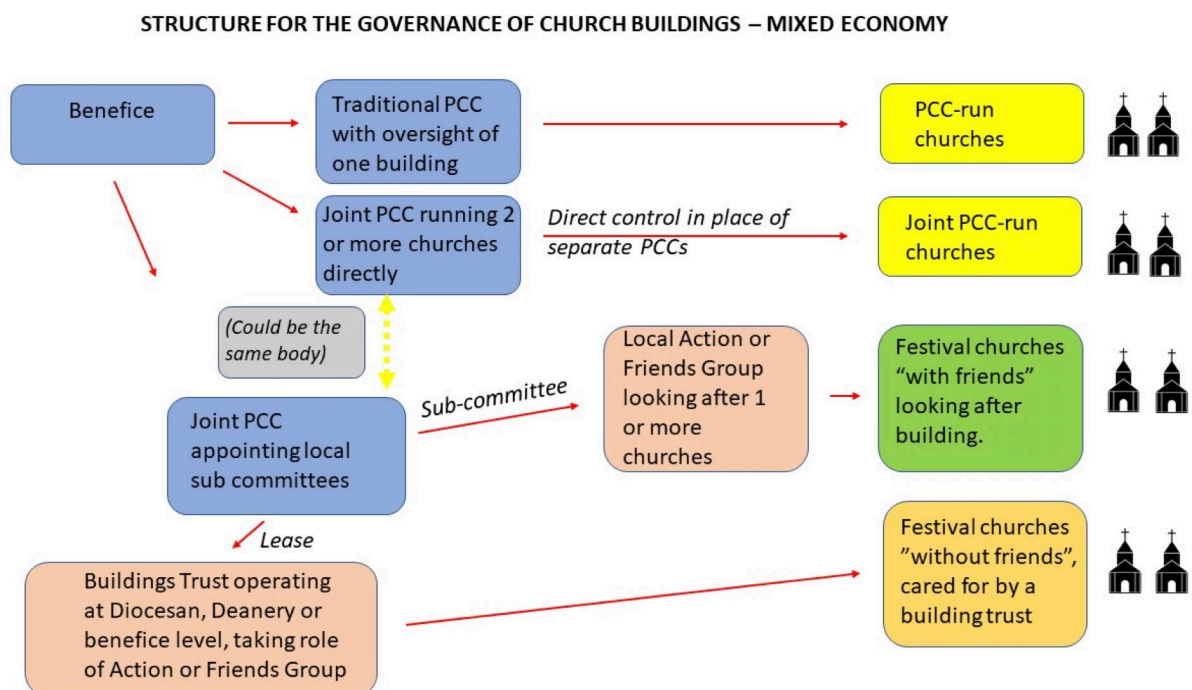
A “hub church” is a thriving and outward-looking parish church which continues to be managed by its own PCC. Such a church can also be a resource for the smaller churches around it, providing services and facilities that they cannot, and helping to resource ministry in festival churches which are otherwise cared for by a friends group or trust.

## VISUALISING SOME MODELS

There follow three illustrations of how these structures might be put in place at parish and benefice level.

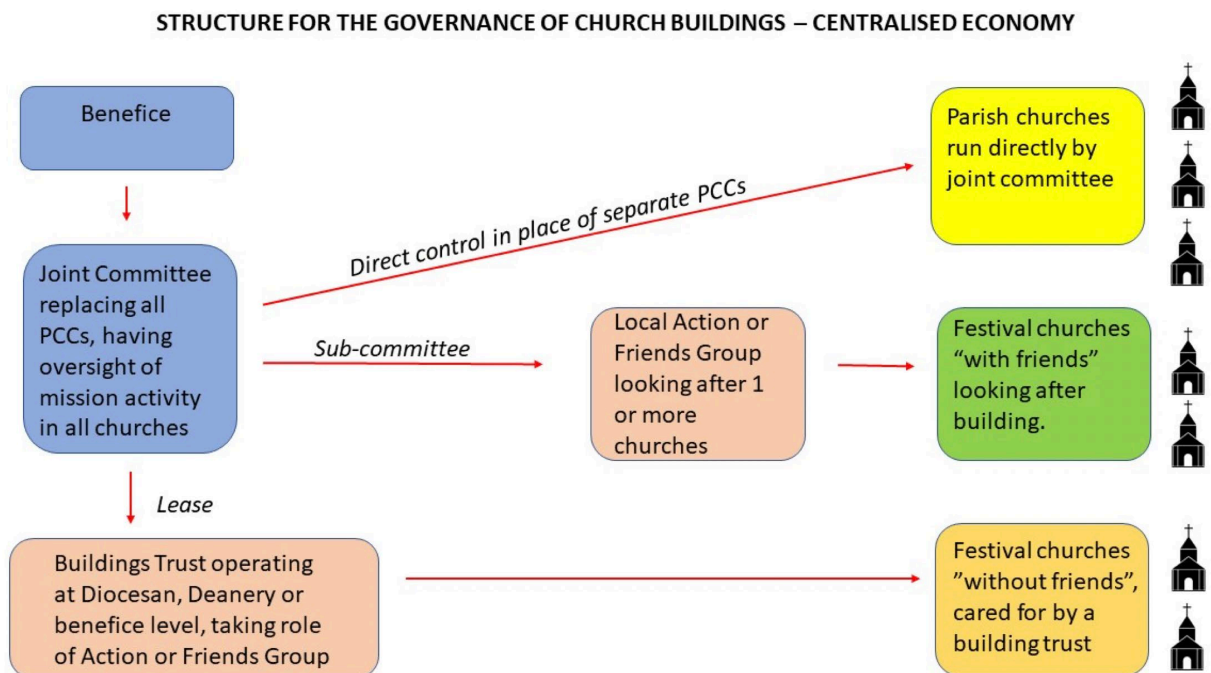
### 1. Mixed Economy

This model shows how a wide variety of different situations can be addressed in one benefice. The governance structure for each church can be adapted to suit local conditions. In order to form a joint committee from 2 or more PCCs, a scheme will have to be approved by Bishop’s Council. However, PCCs can appoint friends group sub-committees under clear terms of reference with no further consent from the diocese.



## 2. Centralised

This model shows how, with the agreement of all the churches in a benefice, it is possible to centralise the functions of all the individual PCCs at benefice level. Given the diverse nature of churches and communities, it may not always be possible to achieve the unanimity required to make this model work, but it would considerably reduce the overall administrative burden for the benefice. In order to form a benefice-wide joint committee, all the PCCs would need to agree a scheme for approval by Bishop’s Council.

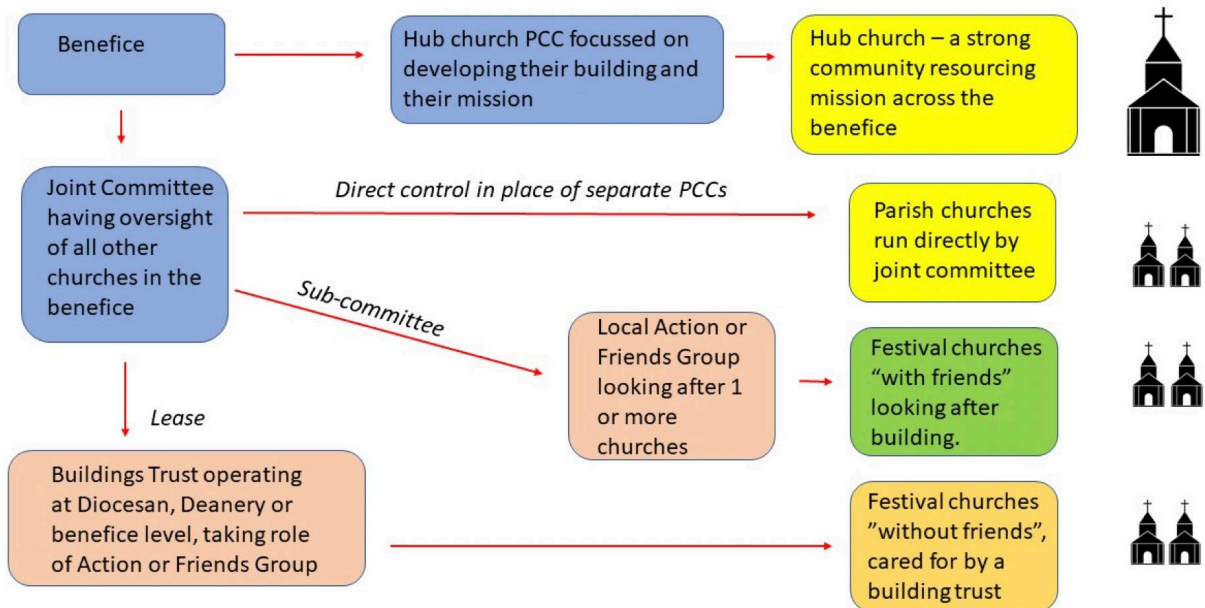




### 3. Hub Church

In benefices where there is already one church which is much more active and better resourced than the other churches, it is possible to make this a hub church. It would be expected that this well-resourced church would continue to offer Sunday and mid-week services, as well as resourcing the more occasional services offered in festival churches.

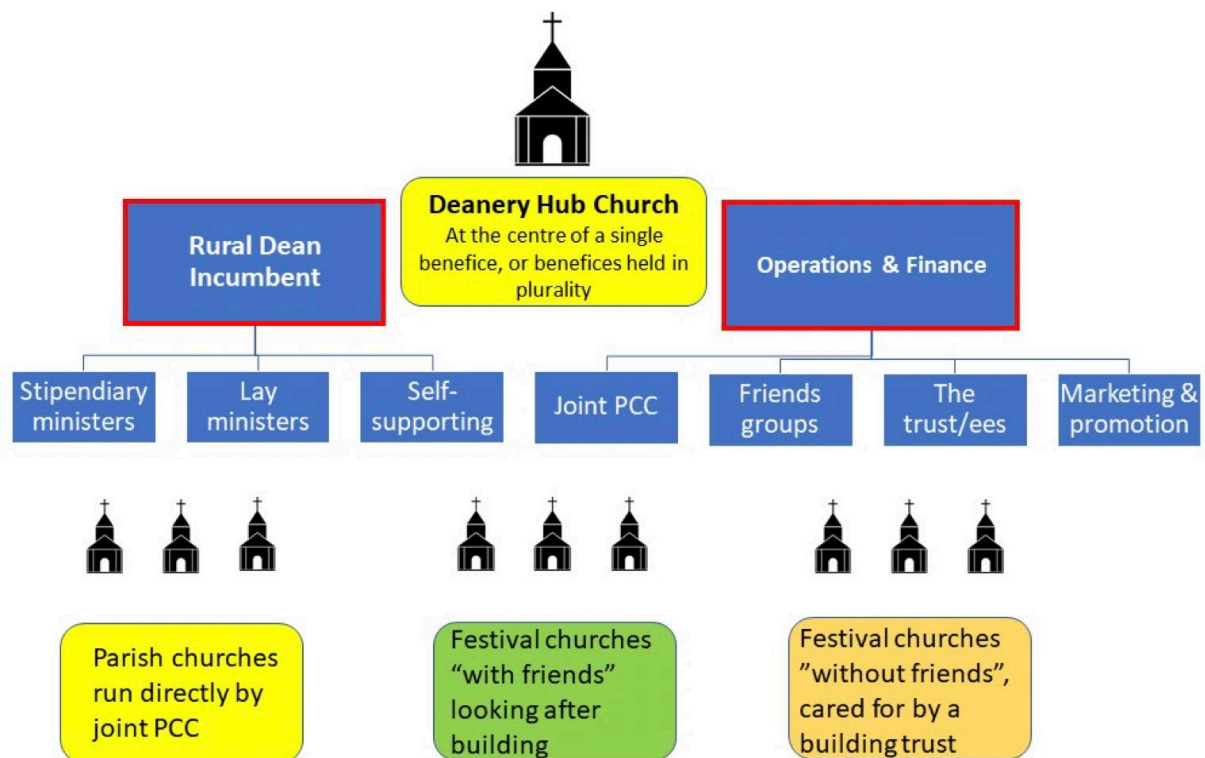
STRUCTURE FOR THE GOVERNANCE OF CHURCH BUILDINGS – HUB CHURCH



#### 4. Single Deanery model

We can also view the potential for new governance models from a deanery viewpoint, rather than benefice, or, indeed, those two things can become the same thing. The deanery of Wigan in the Diocese of Liverpool formerly comprised 29 parishes, variously grouped into teams and benefices. In 2019 a new structure was brought into operation, with the 29 individual parishes now combined into 9 new parishes, and those parishes grouped into a single benefice, contiguous with the deanery. The work required to get the pastoral scheme through was considerable, with a large number of objections. The long-standing mechanism for holding benefices in plurality, combined with the new possibilities around joint councils, means that the same on-the-ground outcome could now be achieved via other means, creating the same highly centralised operation as in Wigan.

Operating at this scale it then becomes possible to envisage professional administrative and financial oversight employed alongside the incumbent, even in a very rural diocese, with reporting lines along the lines illustrated below.





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