

**Report to the Annual Parochial
Church Meeting of
The Parish of New Town and the
Hythe for 2026
St Stephen's Church Centre**



Meeting to be held on 26 April 2026



Reports for APCM April 2026

Annual Priest-In-Charge Report

Introduction

As we gather for this year's APCM, we do so mindful of the wider context in which we live and worship. Our local life as a church sits within a world that can feel uncertain and complex, and yet we are reminded again that we are anchored in God's love and the hope we have in Christ.

This past year at St Stephen's has been full, active, and outward-facing, with much to give thanks for. Alongside this activity, there has also been a continued invitation to deepen our life of prayer and to listen for what God is saying to us as a church.

Incumbent Overview

It continues to be a privilege to serve as Priest-in-Charge of St Stephen's alongside St Margaret's. The relationship between the two churches remains a strength, and I am grateful for the ways in which we support and enrich one another.

St Stephen's continues to be a place of energy, creativity, and welcome. There is a clear heart for the community, and a willingness to respond to need with generosity and openness.

This year has also included a period of compassionate leave for me personally. I am deeply thankful for the way this was held within the church: with care, prayer, and support. It has been a reminder that the ministry of the church is shared, and that the life of the church continues not because of one person, but because of the faithfulness of many. I return with a renewed sense of gratitude and a deep appreciation for all that has been sustained during that time.

Worship

Our pattern of worship continues to offer a variety of styles, including Messy Church, Café Church, and Holy Communion, providing accessible ways for people to engage with faith.

Messy Church and Café Church continue to be important spaces of welcome, creativity, and conversation. My thanks go to all who lead and support these services, and especially to Louise, whose growing confidence in leading has been a real encouragement, alongside Debbie, Denise, and the wider team.

We are also blessed by those who are stepping into preaching and leading. Thank you to John C and Eddie for beginning to take on this role, and to Annie for her increasing contribution to service planning. Sheila's first year as Churchwarden has also included visible leadership within services, which is much appreciated.

I would also like to acknowledge the faithful support of Rev Jackie across both churches, and to thank Rev Christine, whose continued presence and ministry, even in a limited capacity, remains a valued part of our life together.

Midweek worship continues faithfully, offering a quieter space for prayer and reflection, and forming an important part of our shared spiritual life.

As always, many contribute to our worship behind the scenes: musicians, sound and media teams, welcomers, and those who prepare food and hospitality. Each role plays a part in creating a space where people can encounter God.

We also said farewell to the Revd Belinda Kerins, who completed her curacy in 2025 and has since been appointed as the next Vicar of Laneside St Peter in the Diocese of Blackburn. Although her ministry was primarily based at St Stephen's, she contributed across both parishes, and we are deeply grateful for all she gave during her time with us.

Pastoral

As with all churches, much of the pastoral life of St Stephen's happens quietly and relationally. The connections formed through groups, conversations, and shared experiences are at the heart of who we are.

The breadth of activity at St Stephen's means that pastoral care often happens in informal and community settings as well as within church structures. This is a strength, and something to be valued and nurtured.

Occasional offices continue to provide important points of connection with the wider community, and it remains a privilege to share in these significant moments.

Mission and Community

St Stephen's continues to be deeply engaged in the life of the local community, and this is one of its greatest strengths.

The Community Hub, Foodbank, Youth Club, and Over 60s Lunch Club all provide vital spaces of connection, support, and belonging. My thanks go to all who lead and serve in these areas, and particularly to Louise in her role as Community Worker, supported by Andrew in administration.

Rainbow Tots, Messy Church, and other family-focused activities continue to build relationships with local families, offering both support and invitation into the life of the church.

Groups such as Neurospicy, Lego Club, and Warhammer reflect the creativity and responsiveness of this church to the needs and interests of the community.

These ministries demonstrate a church that is open, welcoming, and engaged, and I am grateful for the many people who make this possible.

Buildings and Future Planning

The building project continues to be a significant focus for St Stephen's, with ongoing work to address repairs, heating, and future sustainability.

I would like to thank all those involved in progressing this work, particularly John C and the building subcommittee and those offering professional expertise and practical support.

This project represents not only the care of our buildings, but also our commitment to sustaining ministry for the future.

Wider Connections

Our partnerships with Kendall, St George's, Wimpole Road Methodist Church, and other organisations continue to be an important part of our shared life.

These connections extend our reach and deepen our witness, and I am grateful for all who invest time and energy in maintaining and developing these relationships.

Conclusion

St Stephen's is a church that is active, generous, and deeply connected to its community. There is much to celebrate and much to give thanks for.

There are also a number of specific thank-yous and acknowledgements that I will share in person at the APCM.

At the same time, we are invited, alongside the wider diocese, to continue to root ourselves in prayer, to listen carefully to God, and to be open to where he may be leading us next.

As we look ahead, my hope is that we continue to seek God together with openness and humility: attentive to his voice, and willing to follow where he leads. More than anything, I long for us to grow as a church in becoming more like Jesus: in how we love, serve, and live out our faith in the world.

With my thanks to you all for your faithfulness, your service, and your commitment to the life of this church.

*Rev Anna Davis
Priest-In Charge
St Stephen's and St Margaret's Churches*

Financial Review for year ending 31st December 2025

Unrestricted Church Income

Voluntary Income saw a 2% increase compared to 2024. Collections decreased by 14%.

We are very grateful to the many loyal church members who continue to support the church and for those who started making regular payments in 2025. Regular voluntary giving and Gift Aid receipts are the largest source of funds, providing 72% of church receipts (excluding interest) and 41% of total unrestricted receipts in 2025. £7032 was fundraised in 2025 for the General and Building funds combined, 2% more than in 2024. Thanks are due to the hardworking volunteers who make these community events and surpluses raised by regular user groups such as the Hub and the Lunch Club run so successfully.

Use of Church income continued to rise, increasing by 22% compared to 2024.

Interest of £10152, was primarily accrued due to the Bequest received in 2023 in the interest-earning CCLA General Deposit Fund.

Church Centre Income

Rental Income decreased by 12.5% on 2024 and Payments increased by 18.8%. The cost of the Cleaning Contractor increased by 93%. After taking this into account, the Church Centre had an operating surplus of £3499 compared to £14836 surplus in 2023.

Thanks are especially due to Andrew Topple for his unceasing commitment to maximising lettings income and reducing costs.

Building Project Receipts

Donations, including two very generous gifts, were received, each of £10000 from donors who wish to remain anonymous. £408 was received from The Abbeygate Community Band.

Fund Raising events included the Christmas Carol event which raised £371 and £640 from the Wimpole Road Community Day.

The total balance set aside across Deposit and Current Accounts for this Project was £163898.19 as at 31 December 2025.

Church and Centre Payments

The Parish Share, which we paid in full, was 2% higher than 2024 and accounted for 73% of church expenditure in 2025.

Expenses that changed significantly in 2025 were:

- New Equipment – The Credit balance on Expenditure was due to the church benefiting from a grant from the Chelmsford Diocese of £5632 for the new cooker that was fitted in 2024 at cost of £6364.
- Upkeep of Services increased by 43%. Significant outlying costs were Presenter Software of £147 and candles at £157.
- Repairs and Maintenance - The significant increase was due to a water leak which cost £7559.96 to resolve and repair net of an insurance payout of £4069.

We continue to owe a huge debt to Martin Kerins and Eddie Weller and their supporters for covering a large proportion of the day-to-day Repair and Maintenance labour costs.

Building Project Payments. Expenditure of £14640 was made up as follows:

R Bedford £6600

D Connal £1440

Williams Holloway £6600

Restricted Funds

Mission Fund. The only addition to this fund was Interest. As at 31 December the fund had decreased by £158 on the 2024 closing balance.

YMCA Youth Club Fund closed with a surplus of £2280. The Parish paid £6720 in 2025 to cover until 30 April 2026. This sum will be added to by Grants in 2026 to ensure that the service is covered until at least 31 October 2027.

Community Worker Fund The original fund held in this account was used up in 2024. £23000 was transferred into this fund from the CCLA General Fund during 2025. Funds to cover the remainder of the fixed term in September 2026 will be moved into this fund from the CCLA General fund as necessary. Funds have been ring-fenced within the General Deposit Account to cover the Community Worker until September 2026. The total in this fund at 31 December 2025 was £23855.

Defibrillator Fund This fund was opened in 2024 as a place to hold funds raised and expenditure incurred to purchase and maintain a Defibrillator which is now mounted on the wall adjacent to the main entrance to the church. The remaining balance is being held to cover future service and maintenance.

Total Church and Centre and Restricted Fund Receipts were £107951.85 and total expenditure of £135359.83 giving a deficit of receipts over payments of £27407.98 at 31 December 2025. £33178.58 of the expenditure was from Deposit Funds set aside for specific purposes.

If receipts and payments net of Building Project and Restricted Funds are taken into account, Church and Centre Receipts were £85001.77 and expenditure was £87771.62 giving a deficit of receipts over payments of £2769.85 at 31 December 2025.

Balance Sheet and Reserve Funds Policy

The closing balance on the General Current Account, net of Restricted Funds, was £9812.09. The Community Worker Account closing balance was £2503.46.

£209750.24 was held in Deposit funds of which £203066.18 was in the unrestricted General Deposit Fund. In 2025 £35498.58 was withdrawn, £3000 of this was transferred into the General Current Account to cover Building Project costs, £23458.58 to pay for the Community Worker, £6720 to cover YMCA and £2320 to top up General Funds. After interest accrued, the net reduction since 31 December 2024 in the General Deposit fund was £24937.90.

After taking sums set aside for the Building Project and Community Worker into account there are sufficient funds to cover three months' general running costs and two months' additional administration salary costs, as required by the Reserve Funds Policy agreed by the PCC in February 2022

Many thanks to Simon Large for preparation and examination of the Accounts.

Chris Poole
Treasurer

Churchwarden's Report

Another year and another APCM report from the wardens. This past year has had its ups and downs. That is true, but it's always great to see our church community coming together to push through any challenges that we may face, to help out any people who walk through our door, to show a smile, to show some compassion and to celebrate our love in Jesus.

It's true what they say the church warden's job is never done and behind the scenes Sheila and myself are constantly asking questions, answering questions, responding to queries, changing banners, tidying things in the kitchen, sorting out problems, creating a few problems and in general just being ever present within the building.

The church is in a good state. As good as it can be really. We obviously have building works hopefully starting soon which you will see from the building report. Everything else has stopped falling apart for the moment and we have had some good results recently in solving some issues.

I would like to take this time to thank our volunteers of various groups that operate within the church that give up their time and their knowledge for benefit of our local community for the benefit of the church itself and for the benefit in the greater mission that we are all on.

Needless to say, we could always do with some more people to help out on said activities. So if you'd like to make some Saturday morning teas and coffees at the Hub or if you'd like to learn how to operate the sound desk or even the computer screen that controls the TVs, please get in touch with myself or Sheila. There's many jobs, big jobs, small jobs, occasional jobs and there's regular jobs. We can find a role for you if you are wanting to give a little bit more back to our community. Keep an eye out for upcoming events in our weekly newsletters that printed and if you are not already on the email list for the monthly newsletter that gets done, please contact myself, Sheila or Andrew in the office to get yourself added to that as it does give you an overview of the month with words from the clergy and the wardens from both churches.

*Ian Brown
For Ian Brown & Sheila Poole
Churchwardens*

Safeguarding

Thankfully it has been another uneventful year at St. Stephen's Church in this regard! We continue to make good progress as measured by the Safeguarding Dashboard - a nationally introduced online tool to guide parishes towards safeguarding excellence. We have now reached Level 3 - the highest level and continue to work towards a full set of 'green lights'. Aspects such as support and oversight meetings for those in charge of church activities, use of social media by the church and ensuring training has been completed by all who need it are part of the on-going work.

Safeguarding is the responsibility of all within our church community and is discussed at every PCC meeting. There are now 27 people from St. Stephen's who have completed some element of training, have a DBS check, or both. We must all remain vigilant as we open our doors to the community and seek to advance God's kingdom in this place.

Finally this will be my last APCM report as my family and I finalise plans to relocate to Northern Ireland. I have learned a great deal and it has been my privilege to act as Parish Safeguarding Officer. I wish my successor all the best in this fulfilling and important role.

*Michael Watkins
Safeguarding Officer*

Church Administration

Generally speaking the day to day Church administration has run smoothly throughout the year. Policies, routine inspections and safety tests have all been completed as required with grateful thanks to the Wardens for their help and support with these.

Ad hoc party hiring's remain up and down with some very busy period and other times of very few (see accounts for further details of the financial implications of these) Thank you to all the Church members who assist with opening and closing for these hirings. The termination of the Fun with Fitness hiring caused a few challenges, but these were resolved and we are pleased that the then available space has been taken by Jesters Theatre Academy who were already well known to us and the temporary closure of Before and After School ChillOut has changed the dynamics with the building; being much quieter first thing in the morning and late afternoon! We still have space available to hire and every effort is made to fully utilise the assets we have whilst using the hirings to further engage the wider community and make facilities available to all. Towards the end of last year we secured two lucrative one of commercial hirings and were also delighted to be able to use the Worship Space once again for the Montessori Christmas Nativity (which was Bible based) and also to welcome 5 year groups from St Georges School to use the space for their Christmas celebrations – it was lovely to welcome lots of new people from the community into the Church and we were grateful for the generous donations made during these events.

We continue to work hard to manage costs constantly looking at our utilities and other suppliers and drive efficiencies as far as possible. I am also pleased that I have been able to support with and oversee various low level building and property maintenance related activities.

I have continued to enjoy working with everybody from St Stephen's supporting the work we seek to do here.

Andrew Topple
Church Administrator

Fabric Report

As well as the normal light bulbs and fuses over the past year the church has had the following works done:

Broken window replaced in the hall

Grant received in 2025 from the Diocese regarding replacement ovens (fitted in 2024)

Shelving in Church Store 2 fitted for Abbeygate Concert Band. Costs shared by band and church

Rear fire door replaced

Temporary fix on the ceiling in the font area

All routine inspections and tests carried out as scheduled and remedial work required undertaken as necessary

Five-yearly electrical inspection – passed after some remedial work

Recent telephone and internet change

Extensive water leak found and rectified, with insurance claim to cover costs.

Pipe work fixed under toilets

Guttering above Worship Area cleared to stop water

Quinquennial Inspection carried out in November on behalf of the Diocese. Report to follow from Inkpen Downie.

Ian Brown & Sheila Poole,
Churchwardens

'St Stephen's Building for the Future'

The project

Planning for the church building project has continued over the last year. The project continues to consist of three parts:

- Repairing the roof, parapets and coping stones in the newer part of the church.
- Replacing the current heating system powered by gas boilers with a zero carbon alternative, and
- Installing an array of photovoltaic panels on the church hall roof to support the churches power demands.

Activity to move the project forward has been pursued by the building subcommittee informed by specialist reports notably from our previous chartered surveyor Richard Bedford and also heating consultants Williams Holloway. John Clifton has provided day-to-day project management.

Roof repairs

Richard Bedford's Defect Report provides the basis for the plan to repair the roof. The aim is to overlay areas of the church centre (not including the church hall) where there is water ingress. Also to overlay the parts of the large flat roof area which are currently sound but showing signs of wear. In recent months, the plan put forward by Richard Bedford to overlay the flat roof, its parapets and the coping stones round the outside of the octagon has been progressing. An initial application to the diocese for a faculty (permission) to carry out the repair was filed in June last year. A tendering process was carried out later in 2025 and a preferred contractor has been identified. The cost of the repairs to the roof is likely to be in the region of £150,000. It is hoped that following a second phase of permissions from the dioceses to proceed with the work, the project can be undertaken in late spring or early summer. The erection of scaffolding will be necessary. This will affect access to parking. The work is likely to take between eight and 10 weeks. For much of that time the whole of the building will be able to be in full use. But for a few days, the children's room and the rooms off the rear corridor and parts of the rear garden and car park will be out of bounds.

Heating and PV panels

On the advice of our heating consultants, the original idea to replace the gas boilers with water-based air source heat pump was rejected in favour of an air conditioning system. We continue to plan for the installation of photovoltaic panels on the church hall roof. Our heating consultants provided a specification for the system which was put out to tender late in 2025. Due to organisational changes in the company originally identified as our preferred provider, we are awaiting confirmation from an alternative provider. The cost will be in the region of £264,000. This includes the heating system and the photovoltaic panels. A first stage faculty application met with general support from the diocese but a more detailed account will need to be agreed by them.

What next?

At the time of writing we are completing the last part of the faculty application for the roof works.

In parallel, we are preparing the way for the heating and PV panel installation by confirming a company as our preferred contractor, agreeing detailed plans, submitting these to the diocese. Also in preparation, we are arranging for some minor reinforcements to the church hall roof to accommodate the panels safely.

We are soon meeting with our newly appointed quinquennial inspector, architect Julia Cameron, to arrange oversight of the project implementation.

A fourth phase of the project, yet to be detailed, will consist of smaller 'making good' works inside and outside the building.

Meeting the projects costs

We started this project with the benefit of around £160,000 available from a bequest. Members of the sub committee have been applying for grants with success to date. A major series of grants by the Colchester City Council together with a grant from Garfield Weston Trust mean that we are now confident that we can pay for the roof works, perhaps even being able to reserve the bequest money to go towards heating and panels. We hope that with further grant support, giving and fundraising we will be able to approach to total monies required to complete the heating and PV installation works with some funds left over to 'make good'.

Church and community support

Thanks to Building sub committee members: Martin Kerins, Michael Watkins, Andrew Topple, Denise Asquez Ian Brown, Sara Scott and Eddie Weller.

Managing a project like this is exciting and tedious by turns. Sometimes it seems incredibly slow; at other times unexpected developments and obstacles or good news stories present themselves. Please pray for the project's completion, for wisdom in the decisions made by the building group and the PCC, and for the funds to finish it!

We are grateful to God for the giving and fundraising to date which demonstrate our congregation's and community's support. May this continue as we move towards the 'spades in the ground' phase.

John Clifton
Project Manager

Messy & Café Church

Messy Church services continue to be a popular and enjoyable service at St Stephen's for all ages.

We have changed the format slightly of the morning and the running order of the service to ensure that we are all start together with worship and end in prayer whilst still having the time to move around the worship space for the activities available. This change has been widely met with positivity and encouragement.

There are a group of regular helpers each month to help out at the tables, and bringing back a worship band thanks to Robbie Bates has been a really lovely addition to the varied music videos that play during the 'messy' time - these videos may link up to the theme, the season or perhaps songs that Kendall Church of England Primary School are learning during their worship sessions also.

Ensuring that the chapel is an area for quiet time, reflection and prayer has been important addition to many - thanks to John Clifton who stations this area and always has the prayer cards and a candle lit for those who visit.

It has been lovely to have some of the younger members of the congregation take part with the worship band, as well as helping to run activities - and something that I am keep to develop further: as well as any other adults who would like to share their gifts and talents with us to deliver this Sunday morning service!

Our Tree Decorating Messy Church service was a memorable way to end the year and of course decorate the beautiful tree that was in the worship space. This service continues to be a stepping stone to many of the local community who will attend and visit once a month and give us the opportunity to talk and share our knowledge and faith with them in the hope that we can help support their faith journey and build upon their foundations and knowledge in a safe welcoming space. Thank you again to all involved.

Cafe Church is another well attended service. Rev Anna and Rev Belinda lead these services and used videos, activities on the tables and mentimeter questions on the screens for real time answers to questions asked: all linking up to the theme or reading of the day.

It is an all age service, and one that is enjoyed by many, being able to sit around tables with other members of the church congregation and then to discuss topics, thoughts, readings with them creates an home group style setting that some may not have had experience of before.

Debbie Liddamores' 'magic porridge pot' is a regular item on the breakfast menu and enjoyed by many, as well as offering other food items for all each service.

Thanks to Debbie, Denise Asquez and the other members who help each month with the preparation, setting up and the clearing away also!

Louise Brown

Kids' Club

It has been another enjoyable year in Kids' Club for the leaders and children alike.

Before each session, the adults look at the Lectionary on the Church of England website, to see which readings have been chosen for the service that day. We then select the most suitable reading for the children and plan activities to go with the text, using the internet to help us. We try to do a variety of tasks so the children are not being asked to do the same type of thing each time. However, on the day, we have to be flexible and adapt our plans if necessary, depending on how many children we have and their ages too.

Sometimes during the past year, we have held Kids' Club at the back of church instead of in the hall. This has happened if there is a baptism or an All Age Service. On Remembrance Sunday for example, we were joined by many Brownies. There are usually two adults per session but if one of the leaders is unable to make it, we organise Kids' Club in the church for Health and Safety reasons.

If anyone would like to help with Kids' Club, please let us know. It is very rewarding seeing the children grow in their faith, knowledge and understanding.

Alison Hutley

Ecumenical Working

St Stephen's and Wimpole Road Methodist Church have continued to work closely together during the year in with both joint & shared worship and Community based activities. During the Easter period we were able to offer a wide range of services across the parish from the two Churches together with our annual joint Pentecost celebration on the Recreation Ground. During the summer Wimpole Road supported the work led by St Stephen's in the co-ordination of the New Town Open Garden's event and then St Stephen's provide invaluable support to Wimpole Road with the New Town Community Day. The year was concluded with our joint support of the St Leonards Carol Services which had a wonderful turn out and the joint Carol Service at Wimpole Road.

Additionally, members from both Churches continue meet on a weekly basis via Zoom for prayer on a Tuesday morning and we pray for the continuation of this special time and that we might find further new and additional ways of working together moving forward.

*Andrew Topple
Church Administrator & Member of Wimpole Road Methodist Church*

Community Worker

Another year has flown by and we are back to APCM report writing time!!

There have been lots of memorable events and activities taken place at the church over the year, and it has been a really joy to see the involvement of so many from the church congregation and the local community taking part and enjoying what we have been able to offer and share!

The New Town Community Day was another great success hosted by Wimpole Road church who kindly donated £640 to us. We were able to link up with Sodexo who helped with the BBQ, brought the food and equipment and meant that members of our church could help run the stall and be the friendly faces that the locals are used to seeing!

New Town Open Gardens+ was an unfortunately slightly soggy rainy type day last July, but despite this we were lucky to have members of the local community open their gardens or share their small businesses and there were enthusiasts who braved the rain and did the trail enjoying what was available to see! We were again lucky to be supported by staff from Sodexo, and there was musicians, Lego club and other activities taking place at the church for the afternoon as well as Wimpole Road Church also. The open gardens is back again this year coming on the Sunday 5th July so keep an eye out for information on that!

Singing For Fun takes place monthly with a small group of attendees, this was something that Rev Belinda was also present at before she has moved away. There's singing songs from stage, screen and in-between and percussion instruments for those who attend.

The Over 60's Lunch club is also a going strong, where over 40 people each luncheon are in attendance and enjoying home cooked meal. We are lucky to have a good team of helpers, and have put in place supporting those who help to gain a Level 1 Food & Hygiene certificate, the same has also been offered to members of The Hub.

Links with the local social prescribers are still strong and have been contact with them to see if we can offer support in getting their contacts involved in various activities we have running.

The Abbeygate Concert band hosted a wonderful VE Day concert at the church and was a really lovely turnout with some flags to wave and songs to sing along too. Thanks to Tesco's Community Champion and Co Op East of England small donations we were able to offer scones, cakes, teas and coffees during the interval. Their Christmas concert was traditional and entertaining also, and a real festive treat to listen too! Excitingly there will be a summer concert taking place on the 20th May by the band - more details to follow.

Rainbow Tots continues to run weekly during the term time for local parents / carers and their preschool aged children. There are four of us volunteers and it is a really great way to meet local families and to get to know them and their children which in turn means we can help signpost and share activities and events taking place at the church and in the local area that is relevant.

I have been more involved with the planning and subsequently running off Messy Church helping Rev Anna and Rev Belinda with the planning and taking more of a leading role in some of the services before Christmas with Rev Anna. This also led to planning and leading our first dedicated Christingle Christmas Eve service for some time at the church. The service was all age and everyone had a Christingle to light and take home with them - it was a lovely way to share the light of Jesus on Christmas Eve!

Light The Night was also a first for us at St Stephen's where myself, Denise Asquez and Sheila Poole stood outside on the 31st October armed with flasks of hot chocolates, glow sticks, leaflets about Christmas, and a small bible verse about Jesus being the Light of Our World in the darkness and lots of fairy lights across the fence and gazebo - we met so many people in the local community and chatted with the children and the adults who were out on their way that evening. Glow sticks and hot chocolates will be at the ready again for this year and it is something I hope we can continue and to share the light and a safe place!

We still have good links with the two local primary schools - there have been visits into St George's infant and Kendall C of E Primary schools as well as various classes visiting the church buildings for different sessions: to learn about baptism, how Christians celebrate, and community engagement. Being a school governor for Kendall also means there are opportunities to go into the school for governor monitoring days, meeting with various teachers and keeping communications open with the RE lead teacher there also. St George's Infant and Junior schools also held all of their Christmas Concerts at the church in the evenings prior to the end of the winter term - something that has not taken place here since pre covid and was lovely to host and see so many members of the community visit.

Donations of books towards Keep Colchester Reading were overflowing the crate in the foyer area regular. Helping support Councillor Lee Scourdis and using the church as a drop off point for the initiative really had a great impact on the support we could give back to the community and giving books to local families at Christmas time.

We finished off the year with Christmas @ The Hub - three Saturday mornings filled with festive fun! We had letter writing to Father Christmas and collecting a reply, biscuit decorating, Christmas card making, decorating baubles / tree decorations where all were invited to attend the following day during the Christmas Tree decorating Messy Church service. The third Sunday was breakfast with Father Christmas - where we were incredibly lucky and to be supported by the Colchester Foodbank with gifts for the children who attended, a North Pole Breakfast was provided for the children and a really lovely morning which did include a visit from the very busy Father Christmas himself! Councillor Kayleigh Rippingdale also helped to support this event and the Rainbow Tots Christmas party with funding also. Sodexo again were invaluable to help us at this event, and prove that this is an incredibly worthwhile link we have with the company and one that I am very thankful for.

This is really just a snippet from the past year - and one that I am again incredibly proud of to look back and see what we have achieved and what we are showing this community that is on offer in all shapes of support, love, welcoming, safe space, friendship whilst keeping Gods mission and showing love for our neighbours forefront. Thank you for all of the help, the listening ears, the taking on jobs, setting up, and everything else in-between to help these activities and events run smoothly and help keep our doors open and Gods love flowing!

Louise Brown
Community Worker

Over 60's Luncheon Club

St Stephens lunch club for the over 60s normally meets the second Monday of each month for food and friendship usually catering for 40 to 50 diners.

I am thankful to everyone who helps because the team are excellent we have good fun in the kitchen and enjoy hosting the club. Most of us have acquired our food hygiene certificates this year with the financial support of the church. St Stephens kindly provides the premises for use free of charge for the club. We charge diners £6 for two courses and any surplus funds after covering the cost of the food shopping goes back to church funds. We have enjoyed donations from Tesco, the Co-Op and a community fund to subsidise the Christmas meal and were also joined by pupils of St George's New town juniors who showcased a lovely sing song. Each month we usually enjoy a game of bingo or a quiz. If you would like to help or find out more about coming along please speak to Louise Brown

Debbie Liddamore

Neurospicy

This group has now been going for 18 months and has grown from 5 or 6 regular attendees to between 8 and 10 most weeks. We have 18 people in our WhatsApp group and 180 followers on our Facebook page.

Autism Anglia events are happening every month and often get lots of people along seeking advice. It is from these events that our numbers have grown. Its still and very organic process.

Last summer we had a meet-up on the Rec during the summer holidays and just before Christmas the RHS came to help us make Christmas wreaths. That was a really lovely day, and we were joined by a few extra people which was lovely. We also received a massive donation of clothes and toys from one member, which was the basis for our pre-loved sale in November which raised £126.

The support that the group offers is really important to those who attend. Most weeks there is a combination of tears and laughter! It can be difficult negotiating different personalities, especially when there is neurodivergence involved, but I hope that it continues to be a beneficial experience for everyone. It's been the encouragement and affirmation of the group that has led to me receiving my ADHD Diagnosis.

Annie Porteous-Butler

Hub Café (The Saturday cafe)

This weekly event is a very special part of our mission and outreach at St. Stephens - vibrant, relaxed, varied and inter-generational. Folk come into our buildings for many different reasons - the sensibly priced refreshments, company and a good natter, Lego, Warhammer, a place for one-off or regular meetings...Pam Cox MP has even held her surgery here! Many have made St. Stephen's their spiritual home as they have come to feel part of something bigger here.

As we said farewell to Belinda in December, a good number of new faces have stepped up to help fill the rota, and we are now back up to strength and well organised. However, there is always room for more and full training is given. It is an enjoyable way to spend a Saturday morning and serve God whilst serving drinks at the same time - it is highly recommended and long may it continue.

Michael Watkins

Lego Club

We have had another great year at Lego club with attendance fluctuating on some weeks but usually bringing in a good crowd. I have been lucky to have the addition of Danny Hill to help me run Lego club on occasions. We look forward to another wonderful year ahead building fun in the community.

Brick Man aka James Maddison

Warhammer Club

This past year has seen us continue our Saturday morning children's Warhammer events at the hub during term times. Having a multitude of children turn up and try painting, some come and try gaming in order for them to learn the hobby and get involved. During the summer holidays we had a couple events where we met up as families at the park for picnics in order just to keep in touch and to continue supporting each other outside of the hobby.

On the adult side of our club, our Friday meetings are getting popular. We regularly have four large games going on, sometimes a fifth with members in our exclusive WhatsApp group reaching 21, where we discuss all things about the hobby, including our favourite content from YouTubers and Game works shop itself and the latest updates and releases coming. We share painting tips and styles. We share list building tips and tricks and generally have a bit of fun.

The core group of adults continues to be the same people. We are a close-knit group of men who regularly discuss everything outside of Warhammer as well. Completely supporting each other with difficult times and difficult situations.

Ian Brown

Rainbow Tots

This year Rainbow Tots has been running successfully with four volunteers.

Louise Brown and myself are the church core volunteers to this group with Amie Ward and Shauna Shelley being present each week also. We ensure that there are always at least 3 leaders for the sessions when we meet.

We have a small core group of parents/carers and children who attend on a weekly basis and others who drop in as and when it fits in with their routines.

We have had some really nice compliments from parents about how welcoming the group is and how they look forward to coming back. Attendance varies weekly but I would say we average up to 10 children a week.

It's a great way of getting to know the 'new' local parents who have recently moved into the area or exploring the parent and child groups in the area – which means we can get to know them and also invite them to other groups happening in the church -Messy Church, the Hub, Warhammer, Lego, Knit and Natter and the fund raising events that take place.

Denise, Louise, Amie and Shauna

Foodbank

With loyal and caring support of our volunteers from St Stephen's & Wimpole Road Churches together with member of our local community we have continued to open twice a week on a Monday evening and a Thursday late morning to offer vital support to so many members of our local community. We have had a few of our volunteers have to leave us (largely due to them moving out of the area) but we have also been able to welcome new volunteers onto the team. We thank all our volunteers for their help and support and wish those who have left us all the best and welcome the new members of the team.

We also thank the Central Foodbank team for their help and support with the food parcels they deliver to us for distribution together with their wider support including volunteer recruitment.

In the last few months we have started to move away from the paper voucher system onto a digital platform. This is taking a bit of getting used to but progress is being made and helps us and the Central Team better track those in need who call upon the services of the Foodbank.

The provision of the Foodbank is a wonderful way in which we as a Church can, in a very practical way, support and come alongside those in need to support them in a caring way and also work with the wider community to deliver this service.

*Andrew Topple
Local Foodbank Co-Ordinator*

Youth Club (run by the YMCA on behalf of the Church, with support from the Church)

Highlights from Christmas term:

- St Stephens has welcomed some new young people this term, alongside their regular committed attendees. They have all settled in really well and staff are supporting them with various individual needs.
- Young people continue to build stronger relationships with staff this term.
- Young people are thriving in new activities being set out by staff. These activities aim for the young people to push themselves and try new things, giving them opportunities to learn new skills and discover new interests.
- Young people who were hesitant to try new activities before are now becoming more and more involved due to stronger trusting relationships that have been built with staff.
- We recently joined the Jack Petchey award scheme, meaning young people can nominate their peers for an award. The young person that wins is then granted £300 to spend within the youth club. One of the winners this term was Imogen, who attends St Stephen's youth club. She decided to spend the grant money on a Christmas party at youth club - this included hire of a silent disco, Dominos pizza and some Christmas art & craft activities.

Most common topics of discussion:

- Starting in new schools or year groups/transitioning from primary to secondary school.
- Subject options in school, considering what's right for the young person.
- Lots of talk around Christmas and the new year, as the young people were very excited for the holiday period.
- Family and friendships.
- Goals and aspirations.

Specific support given to young people this term:

- Supporting a young person in the club, who has additional needs, to socialise with his peers rather than focusing solely on the adults within the session. Allowing him to do so slowly and as he feels comfortable.
- Supporting young people with the transition from primary to secondary school, changing the perspective from it being scary to being exciting.
- Supporting a young person with communication skills; using full sentences and building conversation skills.

What does engagement look like here?

- The young people who attend St Stephens come on a very regular basis, proving what a safe space it is for those in the area.
- Young people arrive excited to see what youth workers have planned for the session, especially if it is challenge of the month day!
- There is a great community feel at St Stephens, the young people are always respectful of the staff and the space.
- Staff are committed to the young people here and their development which can be seen by the activities facilitated by staff. Young peoples resilience can be seen growing through their approach to club activities.
- We still have multiple volunteers, which means there are always lots of activities on offer, as well as plenty of opportunity for support and discussion with a trusted adult.

Next term we are looking forward to:

- Building stronger relationships with current and new attendees
- Hearing about young peoples experiences in their new schools
- Encouraging further independence
- More monthly team challenges, co-designed with the young people
- Continuing to upskill our fantastic volunteers so they can continue to develop their youth work skills.

Jack Petchey award winner:

Imogen has fantastic attendance at youth club and she is always keen to get involved with the activities on offer. Her engagement is brilliant and she is always keen to try new things and to put forwards her ideas. She has a positive attitude and is kind and caring towards her peers. Imogen loves to help others and is always polite and friendly to those around her.

Becky Whitaker
YMCA Essex
Youth Services Manager

Deanery Synod Report 2025

Lay representatives plus clergy from all the Anglican churches in the Colchester Deanery usually meet three times per year, to hear what's going on in the Diocese and nationally, and to discuss and share ideas about how we can work together more effectively across Colchester. During 2025, however, it was decided that the Synod meeting in October would not take place, as we held our first Deanery Day instead. Please find below a short report on the Deanery Synod Meetings held during 2025.

12th March 2024 – At St. Michael's Church, Myland, Colchester

Our speaker for this Synod was Wendy Lidgate, Programme Manager for Colchester Episcopal Area. Wendy introduced herself and explained her role. She also explained the background behind the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMIBB) and how her role fits into it. Wendy's role is to help us all plan how each and every parish can tap into this fund.

18th June 2024 – At St. Peter’s Church, Boxted

Our speaker for this Synod was Sam Fowler, From Christian Youth Outreach (CYO). Sam started off by introducing himself and a little bit about what CYO do. CYO's vision and aim is for every school in the Colchester area to be regularly prayed for by at least one Colchester Church, and that every Colchester Church will be regularly praying for at least one local Colchester school - at least once every term. Sam stated that at the moment an amazing 45% of schools across Colchester are prayed for by churches. They would like to get this to 100%.

Report Document compiled by: Andrew Topple on behalf of Rev Anna Davis

April 2026