

Fairer Share Review

Archdeaconry Focus Group discussions - Outcomes

5th & 9th of May 2022

Purpose and Participation

The focus group discussions aimed to gain an understanding of parishes' views on options as we redesign the fairer share scheme and to explore ways we can encourage good levels of engagement and support for any changes we make.

The deeper the consultation the more confident we can be that we have considered a wide range of opinions and options and that the recommended system will be the best we can achieve.

25 people participated, representing a variety of lay parish officer roles and some clergy, across all contexts (rural, urban, market towns, etc.)

The focus group discussions were **positive, engaging and creative**, providing helpful feedback to:

- shape options
- help frame questions for the upcoming online survey in June, and
- inform thinking in relation to the ongoing review process.

Question 1: What principles should we use to evaluate and decide what scheme changes we want to implement?

Common ground

- Consensus that the principles are sensible (Generosity, Simplicity, Transparency, Mutual support, Objectivity, Supports growth, Predictable, Administrable)
- **Generosity** seen as the heart of our faith
- **Transparency** seen as essential - “**what money is for, where it is going to**”. Imperative to make (more) information available that enable parishes to understand how their giving relates to what is being received
- Other principles highlighted: **Mutual support, Simplicity, Objectivity**
- Questioned the principles of ‘**supports growth**’ as ideally the scheme should support a variety of contexts and situations, be it growth, decline, receiving, giving, sustaining

Other reflections

- The principle of ‘**accountability**’ – how do we enable parishes to be accountable for ministry?
- A system that is agile and can respond in a timely manner to changes in circumstances

- A system that encourages mission, enables new kinds of ministry, growth and glorifies God
- Call it what it is ‘mission & ministry fund’ as this will help with transparency
- A system that supports forward planning: churches need predictability and certainty

Question 2: What will be a fair way to incorporate the principle of relative ability to give in a scheme and what do you think about using separate funds for ‘hardship’ or ‘growth’?

Common ground

- ‘Relative ability to give’ is considered a sensible way to **express the principle of ‘mutual support’** within a scheme – recognising that we are connected to each other and some can give more (giving parishes), thereby supporting those that are less well off (receiving parishes)
- The discussions identified that we need to identify and decide **WHO we are talking about**. E.g., are we seeking to understand and quantify the ‘relative ability to give’ of the PCC, the wider community as Church of England ‘the cure of souls’, the members or a combination of?
- Once we establish WHO we are talking about, there are **objective measures available that we can apply** in a scheme, e.g.:
 - Wider community – Indices of multiple deprivation (IMD)
 - PCC – annual published PCC accounts
 - Members – Experian data (which can provide data at a postcode level)
- A **separate growth or hardship fund was not supported** by the majority, as participants felt this counter the principles of transparency and simplicity and focus should be on enabling mutual support at a local level. Many felt this would result in a bureaucratic process.

Other reflections

- Is this measure a red herring and does it complicate the calculation? Is it about ‘ability to give’ or is it about ‘willingness to give’ which is a more fundamental stewardship challenge?

Question 3: What if any consideration should be given to PCC finances as part of a share scheme?

Common ground

- **Broad support to give more consideration to PCC finances** either as part of or alongside a share scheme, bringing a degree of realism, transparency, objectivity and accountability
- **Broad support for PCCs to indicate if reserves are being used to pay share** as this could be an ‘early warning’ indicator; however, it was suggested that this needs to be **in conjunction with ‘average giving per member’** as this will identify stewardship issues

- PCC finances come with its own issues such as unexpected or one-off large income/expenditure, legacies, types of funds, disparity of historical assets and does it counter the principle of simplicity

Question 4: If we are to continue with a membership-based scheme, what in your opinion will be a fair way to define and count members?

Common ground

- Consensus **to define and quantify membership is difficult and can be subjective**, particularly for churches with large congregations
- Dissatisfaction with the current methods of both defining and counting membership and that language might be unhelpful – attendance and worshippers vs financial supporters
- The discussions identified that we need to identify and decide **WHO we are talking about**. E.g., are we seeking to define and quantify the community – Church of England (CofE) as ‘the cure of souls’; the worshipping community that may/may not contribute financially; the financial supporters that may/may not be part of the worshipping community, or a combination of?
- Once we establish WHO we are talking about, there are **objective measures available that we can apply** in a scheme, e.g.:
 - Community – Civic or church electoral roll
 - Worshipping community – Mission statistics (worshipping community, average weekly attendance, average Sunday attendance), church attendance register
 - Financial contributors – identified by church records such as Parish Giving Scheme, standing orders, gift aid envelopes
- Who attends can be very different from who gives

Other reflections

- Idea of counting members seems wrong; CofE is ‘the cure of souls’.
- A scheme (mainly) based on membership undermines mission and disincentivises growth
- Existing member definition contradictory as regular attendees are not necessarily financial supporters and vice versa
- Is the challenge of how we define a member masking a fundamental stewardship issue?
- ‘Soul destroying’ to pay share during vacancy when often during the interregnum there is significant reliance on the volunteers and lay leaders of the church

Question 5: What are the pros and cons of a hybrid (cost/membership) system and should the diocese develop a more hybrid share scheme?

Common ground

- **Broad support to explore a hybrid option further** as participants liked the transparency and reality of such a system with greater visibility and awareness of what is affordable to give as well as the ministry received
- A sense of the real cost should be shared with parishes; the more information the diocese can make available, the better

Other reflections

- Does this move away from principle of simplicity?
- Will it hasten the diminishing of mutual support and undermine support for those in need the most?
- A scheme heavily weighted towards 'cost based' encourages parochial thinking – mutual support does not stop at boundary or when able to pay for own ministry
- Might inadvertently encourage 'shopping' or 'pay as you go' mentality; making the provision of mission and ministry more transactional
- Would this cause issues around 'ministry paid for' vs 'ministry received' particularly when in interregnum and or multi-church benefice?

Question 6: Are there approaches and ideas which you came into the meeting with and have not been able to talk about?

- The seriousness of parishes' loss of trust in the current system and therefore doing nothing and tweaks are not an option
- The way we currently manage share for parishes in interregnum was challenged
- Suggestion to create a central fund for faculty applications and fabric repairs
- Where is the Church of England and Salisbury diocese response to the [Taylor Review: Sustainability of English Churches and Cathedrals](#), December 2017?
- There should be equity and share of both expenditure and income with parishes, e.g., weddings & funerals fees
- More support for PCC treasurers on guidance of good financial stewardship as some are either not utilising reserves or eroding reserves
- Simpler language e.g., 'are you a giving or receiving church' that will make the benchmarking and conversation easier

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