

Fairer Share - What do you think?

Following the review of Fairer Share, we are now going to consult the Diocese on some possible changes to the way Share is calculated and managed.

That was the message from Diocesan Secretary David Pain at Diocesan Synod.

David said:

"We have learnt from other dioceses both about how they structure their 'common funds/ share' and that those who have successfully made changes to the approach have done this through widespread consultation.

"The Bishops Council has decided on a period of consultation so that we hear your feedback on the principles we are proposing and on some propositions for change. Nothing is decided, and in light of the consultation we may decide to make no change, we may decide to implement some or all of the propositions, and through the consultation we may gather further new ideas.

"If changes are made, we would make these decisions at the October Synod. We would then run a 'shadow' process in 2021 by which we continue to use the old numbers, while communicating and discussing any changed numbers at parish level. A new set of numbers would start in 2022."

David said there were 5 Principles by which we plan to work:

"Our first principle is that we take a consultative approach; we are going to be transparent about what we have learnt so far, what we learn through the consultation and we are going to consult widely. Fairer Share is the means by which we express in financial terms what it means to be one body as a diocese, therefore we need to own this together.

"Our second principle is that share calculation includes a consideration of relative size of each church. At present we do this based on a count of 'members'.

"Our proposition for consultation is that we move to a 'basket' of measures, we have not decided which measures would be in the basket or what their relative weight should be.

"We have identified 5 options for inclusion in the basket: the current member count; using the Average Weekly Attendance (which includes non- traditional services, like breakfast church or Messy Church); the Usual Sunday Attendance figure which each parish returns to the national church each autumn; the electoral roll; and the population resident in the parish.

"Additionally, we propose that we move from counting on a rolling average of 3 years to 5 years to smooth out some of the changes.

"Our third principle is that the share calculation includes consideration of relative affluence. At present this is done by self-assessment. Our proposition is that we use the objective measures of IMD (indices of multiple deprivation- the national church shares this data for each parish already) or the Experian data. Additionally, we propose that this data would be the start of a conversation with the Archdeacon so that it is not assumed to be 'the answer' but a discussion starter which takes into consideration the particular circumstances of the local church.

"Our fourth principle is that the share calculation includes consideration of relative affordability. At present this is considered on a case by case basis: this would include the impact of things like new missional priorities, urgent building repairs, or the level of unrestricted reserves. Our proposition is that we continue to consider this on a case by case basis, but that we are more transparent about the criteria used, we welcome ideas on how this might best be handled so we are responsive to changed local circumstances and also fair.

"Our fifth principle is that share calculation includes consideration of the cost of ministry. At present this is done by taking into the calculation the number of stipendiary roles, and the number of share members- with a system of 'modification' then applied to the affluence self-assessment category in order to respond to the impact of being a large or small church.

"Our proposition is that we make no change to this until we have completed our work on 're-patterning ministry'; this will give a more rounded sense of the total costs of ministry of all types both locally and within the life of the diocese as a whole."

David said that we all recognised that at present some rural churches, even with multiple parishes struggle to cover the cost of ministry, while some of the large churches contribute much more than the cost of their stipendiary posts as well as managing local costs of ministry and that this consultation was about making the system as fair as possible for everyone.

David said the consultation would run until June, and parishes and deaneries would be asked for feedback on the 5 principles and each of the propositions.

From July to October, the consultation will share the actual figures for each parish which would be produced by applying the propositions. We will ask for feedback on how feasible it is to move to these new figures and any adjustments needed.

The consultation will include 3 elements.

We are producing a discussion guide which can be used in parish, deanery and archdeaconry face to face meetings- synod members are asked to include this when they are planning agendas. Members of diocesan staff and the Finance committee, together with the Archdeacons are ready to attend these meetings if invited.

Additionally, we will be running focus groups (please volunteer if you would like to join these) and conducting online surveys.

To access Rosemary Cook (from the Fairer Share Review Group)'s Synod slides, [click here](#).