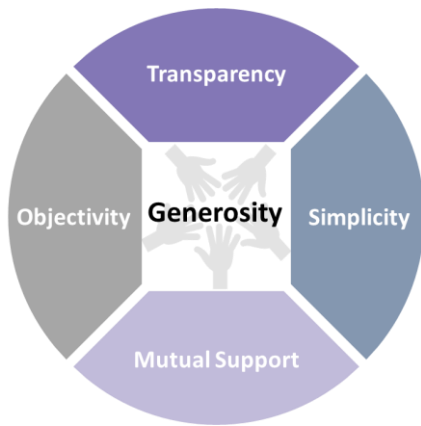


Outcomes from Archdeaconry focus group discussions

5th & 9th May 2022

25 people from across the diocese – representing all contexts, lay & ordained – participated in focus group discussions, as part of the share review process.

Participants were asked to consider 6 questions that has helped the Fairer Share Review Group to gain an understanding of parishes' views on share scheme options and explore ways we can encourage good levels of engagement and support for any changes we make. This is what participants told us.



Scheme principles

Participants identified essential principles to guide options generation, as well as evaluation.

Generosity is seen as the heart of our faith.

Scheme **transparency** is seen as key - “**what money is for, where it is going to**” as this will help to re-establish trust in the scheme and enable parishes to understand how giving relates to what is being received. Other principles highlighted: **Mutual support, Simplicity and Objectivity.**

Ability to give

It is a way to express the principle of **mutual support** within the 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).

Who are we talking about? Are we seeking to understand and quantify the ‘relative ability to give’ of the wider community (Church of England ‘the cure of souls’), the PCC, the members or combination of?

Objective measures are available once we decide WHO we are talking about, for example:

- Wider community – Indicis 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** of participants, as it is counter the principles of transparency and simplicity, resulting in a bureaucratic process. Focus should be on enabling mutual support at a local level.



Defining and counting members

This remains a **difficult area** and can be subjective, particularly for churches with large congregations. Those who attend, can be very different from those who give to the church.

Who are we seeking to identify & count? Is it the wider community (Church of England ‘the cure of souls’), the worshipping community that may (not) contribute financially; the financial supporters that may (not) be part of the worshipping community or a combination of?

Objective measures are available once we decide WHO we are seeking to identify and count, for example:

- Wider community – Civic or Church electoral role
- Worshipping community – Mission statistics (worshipping community, average weekly attendance, average Sunday attendance), church attendance register
- Financial supporters – identified by church records such as Parish Giving Scheme, standing orders, gift aid envelopes



PCC finances as part of a share scheme

There is **broad support to give more consideration to PCC finances** either as part of or together with a share scheme, bringing a degree of realism, transparency, objectivity and accountability.

There is also **broad support for PCCs to indicate if reserves are being used to pay share** as this could be an ‘early warning’ indicator; however, this needs to be considered **in conjunction with ‘average giving per member’** to identify stewardship issues.

A hybrid scheme with both cost and membership elements

There is **broad support to explore a hybrid scheme further** (that includes both cost and membership elements) as participants liked the transparency of such a system with greater visibility and awareness of what is affordable to give as well as the ministry received. See [Diocese of Gloucester scheme](#)

However, we need to guard against diminishing mutual support and parochial thinking.

