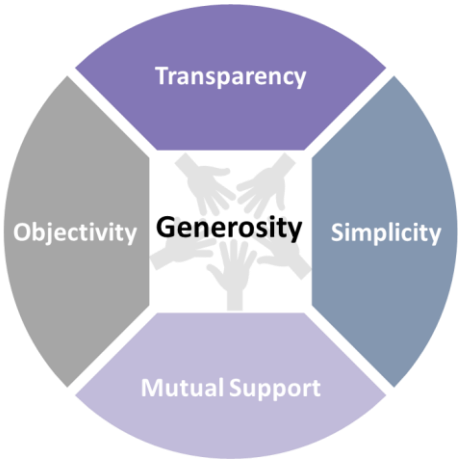
Outcomes from Archdeaconry focus group discussions

25 people from across the diocese – representing all contexts, lay & ordained – participated in focus group discussions in May, 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

Generosity is seen as the heart of our faith

Scheme **transparency** is seen as key - "**what money is for, where it is going to**" and will re-establish trust and support from parishes, together with the principles of **Mutual support, Simplicity** and **Objectivity**

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Ability to give

It is a **measure of <u>mutual support</u>**, 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 seeking to measure? Is it the wider community (Church of England 'the cure of souls'), the PCC or the members?

Objective measures are available, 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.

PCC finances as part of a share scheme

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

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

Defining and counting members

This is 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?

Objective measures are available, 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 contributors – identified by church records such as Parish Giving Scheme, standing orders, gift aid envelopes

A hybrid scheme with both cost and membership elements

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. See Diocese of Gloucester scheme

However, there were reservations such as: 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 the parish boundary or when a parish is able to pay for its own ministry.

In summary, the focus group discussions have provided helpful feedback to shape our thinking around scheme options:

- Identified essential principles to guide options generation, as well as evaluation
- If the future scheme includes 'ability to give' and 'membership', we need to establish WHO we are talking about as this will help us to select the appropriate objective measures
- There is broad support to give more consideration to PCC finances and explore a hybrid scheme (that includes both cost and membership elements); both provides a greater level of transparency and awareness, enabling parishes to be more accountable for ministry. However, we need to guard against diminishing mutual support and parochial thinking
- There is unanimous support for more information, enabling parishes to understand how giving relates to what is received; encourage mutual support and re-establish trust in the share scheme.