



COMMON MISSION FUND REVIEW GROUP

Report and Recommendations

Introduction

1. At the heart of our Christian faith is the understanding that we give in response to a generous God and to enable the love of Christ to be generously shared. We are asked to give according to our potential so all can receive according to their need. This is the conviction that underpins the Common Mission Fund (CMF). It is only by sharing our resources together that we can ensure ministry can be provided where it is needed, not just where it can be afforded. The CMF is the way in which we fund our shared mission and ministry in the Diocese of Winchester, first and foremost through funding local parish ministry.
2. The system is based on mutual support and accountability between all of our parishes. The CMF looks to ensure the financial request to each parish is reached in a consistent and objective manner. All calculations are based on the same two pieces of information for every parish – the size of the ‘Community of Worshippers’¹ and relative ‘Affluence Band’².
3. The Common Mission Fund (CMF) was launched in 2015 following its approval by Diocesan Synod in 2014. In 2018/2019 a small reflection group carried out a review to identify the key areas of difficulty being experienced by some parishes and to recommend ways of assisting them and so improving the system by adding greater sustainability and rigour to the model.
4. The recommendations from that group were approved at Diocesan Synod in November 2019 and implemented for the 2020 request onwards. These were:
 - Move to a 5 year rolling average (from 3) for Community of Worshippers (CoW) figures.
 - The reduction offered to parishes with CoW over 200 should remain.
 - Multi-Parish benefices with a combined CoW of over 200 should not be eligible for the larger CoW reduction.
 - Launch a Communications Campaign around the CMF.
 - Changes to process:
 - Make historic CoW figures available to parishes
 - Use of terminology “CoW” rather than “WComm”
 - Commitment to update affluence data every 3 years
 - Encourage greater use of flight path³

¹ [Calculating-Your-Community-of-Worshippers.pdf \(anglican.org\)](#)

² [Understanding-Relative-Affluence.pdf \(anglican.org\)](#)

³ The system by which parishes can apply for a multi-year gradually decreasing reduction, enabling them to work towards contributing in full. All flight paths are approved by the Special Considerations Panel consisting of the Suffragan Bishops and both Archdeacons.

- Allow benefices to request their CMF contribution is displayed at benefice level rather than parish
5. The Diocese of Winchester and the wider world is now in a significantly different place to when the Common Mission Fund was introduced in 2015 and when the last review took place in 2018/19. In recognition of this the Bishop's Council commissioned a new Common Mission Fund Review Group in 2023 to make suggestions around the CMF operational process. The group is not looking at alternative models or systems for how the Common Mission Fund is allocated, but will make recommendations on how to improve the current model.
6. Group Membership:
- Elspeth Mackeggie-Gurney (Chair)
Chair of the Diocesan Finance Committee, Deanery Finance Chair, Alton, member of Bishop's Council
 - Simon Newham
Area Dean Lyndhurst, Vicar of Brockenhurst, Boldre and South Baddesley, member of Diocesan Synod
 - Simon Robertson
Joint Area Dean Southampton, Vicar of Bitterne Park, Southampton
 - Andrew Holder
Deanery Finance Chair Winchester
 - Michael Coleman
Deanery Finance Chair Andover, member of Diocesan Synod
 - Emma Du Croz
Operations Manager Parish of Southampton Saint Mary
 - Andrew Croom-Johnson
Treasurer Parish of Binsted
 - Maddie Hedley
Churchwarden and Treasurer Parish of Longstock, member of Bishop's Council, member of Diocesan Synod

Consultation

7. When starting this task, the review group were struck by the positive engagement and change that stemmed from the 2024-2026 triennial budget consultation process, so modelled the CMF consultation on this. The CMF consultation included an online survey, zoom consultation sessions and presentations at the informal meetings of the houses of clergy and laity of Diocesan Synod. Analysis of the responses received can be found in **Appendix 1** of this report.

Recommendations

8. The group wanted to ensure that any recommendation supported ministry and mission within parishes and encouraged trusting, open and honest communication between all parts of the parochial and diocesan structures.

9. The group noted that the review of Parish Share across all dioceses, commissioned by the national church,⁴ concluded that the type of system a diocese uses to calculate requests makes little difference to the success of Parish Share. The report was received in May 2024, following the review groups initial recommendations. The key finding of the report, received places importance on how a diocese communicates and builds relationships with parishes .
10. The general overview of the feedback received is that the principle of the Common Mission Fund is fair and easy to understand, ensuring ministry can be provided where required not just where it can be afforded.
11. For ease of reference a summary of all recommendations can be found in **Appendix 2**.

Communications

12. The subject of 'Communication' repeatedly came up throughout the feedback received and as the review group worked through their recommendations. The feedback received commended the positive improvement with communications since the Head of Communications started in post, but most acknowledged the journey was not complete.
13. The survey also highlighted a number of misconceptions and rumours around the Common Mission Fund and Diocesan Finances. Some respondents also requested information that is available on the diocesan website, leading the group to consider if this information is easily accessible. A large percentage of respondents requested simple clear information on Diocesan expenditure.
14. The group did note a small minority of people who refused to engage with the information provided or the opportunity to feed into this process. Many unhappy with, and asking for change in, diocesan or national policy outside of the scope of this review group.
15. Feedback on initial recommendations presented highlighted the importance of how parishes are thanked for their contributions, with a particular note that the thank you letter from the Bishop of Winchester recently circulated (May 2024) was well received. The group felt strongly that all parishes who make a contribution, even if not in full, should be thanked in a letter from all three bishops.

Recommendation 1 – The Head of Communications and the Operations and Governance Manager develop a rolling Common Mission Fund communications strategy⁵

- Emphasising the importance of thanking those who pay in a meaningful way.
- Ensuring there is a constant drip feed of information, not communicate once and assume everyone has got it.
- Strong focus on the theology of the CMF.
- Materials tailored to different audiences, specifically those not tech savvy.
- Real life stories and examples from parishes .
- Highlighting support available for parishes from the Diocesan Staff Team.

⁴ A copy of the report can be downloaded here [Parish Share Report - March 2024 | The Church of England](#)

⁵ CMF Review Group to review and have input into initial strategy design.

- Empower people at all levels to take ownership of and responsibility for communicating within their spheres of influence.
- Change in use of language away from CMF as a 'gift' and towards CMF as a 'request' that leads to a 'covenant' between parishes.

Recommendation 2 – Alongside the WDBF Annual Report and Accounts produce a simple A4 high level summary of the diocesan income and expenditure each year.

Community of Worshippers

16. Parishes are asked to submit various different figures with regards their congregations throughout the year (e.g. Statistics for Mission, Community of Worshippers, Electoral Roll). Each figure has a different purpose and audience and therefore a different criteria of who is counted. Feedback has been received that this is an additional administrative burden on already stretched resources. There was also a sense from parishes that this figure could be underreported to gain a lower CMF request or inflated, under the perception this would cast the parish in a more favourable light.
17. The group considered and modelled the impact of using an alternative figure than the Community of Worshippers⁶ in the CMF calculation. The use of the electoral roll was ruled out as, in most cases, it did not capture those who could be expected to give to a parish. Much thought was given to statistics for mission worshipping community figure⁷ as an alternative – however this metric includes fresh expressions and messy church. The group conclude these attendees do not usually donate financially to the parish and may produce an unrealistic CMF request.
18. The group concluded therefore none of the available alternative submissions were suitable to use, there were notable discrepancies in the alternative data and it did not provide a full sound foundation for moving calculation methodology. They concluded that the Community of Worshippers was the most accurate figure to assess those who should be expected to contribute.
19. Comparing the stats for mission return, electoral roll and community of worshippers for each parish highlighted inconsistencies between the different figures, sometime quite significant in size. The group also noted the significant effort in recent years that had gone into ensuring historic Community of Worshipper were accurate. Alternative figures had not received this level of scrutiny and may have some inaccuracies. Nonetheless, comparison with other sources could help to identify potential issues and further improve the CoW data.

Recommendation 3 – To aid accuracy and accountability the Parish Portal be updated to include mandatory completion of the calculation form for Community of Worshippers as part of the submission. The submission must be digitally signed by the incumbent and churchwarden in addition to the member making the return.

⁶ Guidance notes for community of worshippers [Calculating-Your-Community-of-Worshippers.pdf \(anglican.org\)](#)

⁷ Guidance notes for statistics for mission worshipping community [WorshippingCommunity.pdf \(churchofengland.org\)](#)

Recommendation 4 – The Diocesan Parish Support Team to provide deanery teams yearly with Stats for Mission, CoW and ER data. Deanery leadership teams⁸ to be empowered to investigate anomalies and support parishes in making accurate returns.

20. The 2018 review group increased the rolling average to 5 years to support parishes experiencing congregational growth and to recognise the delay between people coming to faith and starting to contribute financially. Something that was highlighted in the consultation was that the inadvertent consequence of this is the burden on parishes experiencing a declining community of worshippers keeping the higher figure for 5 years.

Recommendation 5 – The CMF is calculated using whichever rolling average (3 or 5 year) figure is lower, thereby supporting parishes in either scenario.

Parishes in Vacancy

21. The group considered the feedback that some parishes perceived that paying CMF in full during an interregnum is unfair. The group felt any discount during a vacancy went against the theology of the CMF and would be in danger of endorsing a “pay for what you get” model. They noted that currently all parishes share a ‘discount’ from the reduction in costs from an interregnum and the income generated from renting a vicarage during a vacancy.
22. The group were also struck that any discount offered to one group of parishes would result in a higher CMF request for all other parishes. The group wished to stress that there was a wider package of support available, rather than just focus purely on reduction to the CMF.

Recommendation 6 – Parish in vacancy continue to pay full CMF. The information provided to parishes in vacancy is reviewed to ensure support available is communicated, highlighting what to do if the parish is facing financial hardship.

Role of the Benefice

23. The group recognised the uniqueness of each benefice within the diocese and there would be scenarios where the ability to reallocate the CMF request between parishes would be helpful.
24. The group concluded that the large worshipping community discount would not apply in this scenario. The groups proposal for benefices is to aid mutual support and partnerships.

Recommendation 7 – If they wish, benefices to be allowed to reallocate their total CMF between their parishes as long as the total request for the benefice remains the same. This can be done at any point in the year and the CMF ask will be updated so parishes will have a 100% payment rate. The Benefice will still pay 100% of that years ask.

⁸ Area Deans, Lay Chair and Deanery Finance Chair

Affluence Bands⁹

25. The group considered the perception that the affluence bands are not fair. They modelled moving to 3 affluence bands (A,B,C) to aid with communication and perception, however the group were concerned about the cliff edge created between each band. The group recognised the value in using external third party data to calculate these bands and the lack of a real alternative independent source of affluence data.
26. There is an existing process in place to review a parishes affluence band. Affluence bands are initially calculated using the data for the geographical parish, if a parish feels their congregation is not reflective of their geographical affluence they can submit the postcodes for solely their community of worshippers to have the affluence calculated using these instead. This review is available to every parish. The group noted that of the 15 affluence band reviews carried out since the data was renewed in 2021, 5 parishes were in too high an affluence band, 7 were in the correct affluence band and 3 were in too low an affluence band. Those in a lower band than their congregation were allowed to retain the lower geographical banding.

Recommendation 8 – The 7 affluence bands will be retained. Parishes to be reminded of the process to have affluence bands calculated based on congregational affluence rather than parish geographic location.

Special Considerations Process

27. The group considered feedback that, as the CMF is a request, it could be perceived as counterintuitive to have to formally apply to a panel for reduction. The group were keen to ensure positive language was used around this process to further support and come alongside parishes. It was also noted the current process was limited to offering financial assistance.
28. The group saw value in expanding the assistance process to work alongside parishes experiencing difficulty, ensuring awareness of the full range of practical support available from the Diocesan Staff Team for a parish. Instead of terminology around approving a reduction in the CMF request, one of the tools available to the PCC Support Panel will be to offer a grant towards the CMF request¹⁰. Even if it is felt a grant is not appropriate the parish will be offered other support that is available in the Diocesan office to help address their situation (such as working with the stewardship adviser).

Recommendation 9 – The Special Considerations Panel to be renamed to the ‘PCC Support Panel’.

Parishes who are unable to contribute in full

29. The group considered how to best support parishes who are unable to pay and work with parishes who choose not to pay. The group noted that the Diocese of Norwich have an overt policy to review parishes not making the full contribution at the point

⁹ [Understanding-Relative-Affluence.pdf \(anglican.org\)](#)

¹⁰ The application process and background information required would remain the same as the current Special Considerations Process.

of vacancy.¹¹ The group was clear that this approach was not appropriate for the Diocese of Winchester and wished to develop a supportive process to stand alongside parishes in this situation.

30. The group recognised some parishes are in regular contact with their deaneries and the diocesan office about the situation they are experiencing. They also noted some parishes still struggled with fear of and/or trust in the central staff team, meaning they did not make contact.

31. Parishes who were unable to pay in full would be supported by the deanery leadership team and parish support team within the diocesan office and directed to the PCC support panel where relevant. The details of how this will work are in development. Parishes who chose not to pay, a decision typically relating to matters of principle, would receive contact from Senior Diocesan Staff or Bishop's Staff Team.

Recommendation 10 – as a matter of course parishes who do not contribute in full should receive contact from Bishop's Staff Team¹² with an aim to open the door of communication to receive support and make a plan for the future.

¹¹ For reference page 20: [PS 2014 Booklet A5 v15.indd \(dioceseofnorwich.org\)](#)

¹² Consisting of the Bishop of Winchester, Bishop of Basingstoke, Bishop of Southampton, Archdeacon of Bournemouth, Archdeacon of Winchester, Assistant Archdeacon, Diocesan Secretary and Head of Communications.

Appendix 1 CMF Review Group Consultation

The survey was open from the 8th January until the 9th February. In total 129 responses were submitted using the online form. In addition the survey was discussed at the Lay Chairs Forum, the informal meetings of the House of Laity and the House of Clergy and two online consultation meetings were held with 10 people in attendance. Feedback from these sessions are included with the Analysis of responses received.

Across the responses received survey the following themes were noted as being shared by multiple respondents:

- There are still a number of misconceptions around the Common Mission Fund and wider Diocesan Finances.
- The perception that costs in the Central Diocesan Staff Team are too high.
- The CMF is the fairest system the respondent has experienced
- The perception that data used to calculate affluence bands is unfair.
- The resentment between parishes who pay in full and those who do not.
- The challenge of being asked to contribute whilst the parish is in vacancy.

Across all responses received:

- 14 used the word **tax**
 - 2 of these responses wished to change perception away from 'tax'
- 4 used the word **gift**
- 25 used the word **fair**
- 5 used the word **unfair**

1. In your own words, what do you understand the Common Mission Fund to be?

- The division of the cost of providing and supporting parochial ministry across the Diocese (86 responses, 66%)
- Incorrect answers (6 responses, 4.5%)

2. What are the greatest benefits of the Common Mission Fund?

- To pay for clergy where it is needed not just where it can be afforded (54 responses, 42%)
- Don't know / none (6 responses, 5%)
- Access to Central Diocesan Staff Team (11 responses, 8.5%)
- Easy to explain (5 responses, 4%)
- Of the responses received:
 - 8 used the word **fair** in a positive way
 - 2 used the word **unfair**
 - 8 used the word **share**

3. Can you tell us what are the greatest challenges with the Common Mission Fund and where you are struggling with it?

- The ability of the parish to pay in full (34 responses, 26%)

- Community of worshippers, 5 year rolling average with a declining congregation (19 responses, 15%)
 - Lack of information about what the CMF pays for (7 responses, 5.5%)
 - Lack of understanding in congregation about CMF (9 responses, 7%)
- 4. What non-financial help do you feel would support you in your context? (For example sharing common learning, sharing of resources.)**
- Clear explanation of what CMF is used for (17 responses, 13%)
 - Specialist support available centrally e.g. HR, Bid Writing, Safeguarding (8 responses, 6%)
 - Sharing resources at deanery level e.g. administrators, treasurers, youth workers (12 responses, 9%)
- 5. How do you think we could improve the CMF process? (*respondents are asked to note the remit of the group is to work within the current framework of the CMF not propose an alternative calculation methodology*)**
- Clear concise explanation of how the CMF is spent (14 responses, 11%)
 - Offering each parish a year's break from CMF on a rolling basis (3 responses, 2%)
 - Offering a reduction during interregnum (3 responses, 2%)
 - Using figure from Stats for Mission return rather than Community of Worshippers (10 responses, 8%)
 - The way in which affluence is calculated (9 responses, 7%)
 - Nothing, the system works well and is fair (9 responses, 7%)
- 6. Where do you go to find information about the Common Mission Fund?**
- Diocesan Website (78 responses, 60.5%)
 - Emails from Diocesan Staff Team (31 responses, 24%)
 - Parish Portal (8 responses, 6%)
 - Contact the Diocesan Staff Team (15 responses, 11.5%)
- 7. Where would you like to find information about the Common Mission Fund?**
- Emails from Diocesan Staff Team (7 responses, 5.5 %)
 - Diocesan Website (41 responses, 32%)
 - i. Multiple responses requested easier navigation on the website
 - Parish Portal (8 responses, 6%)
 - Face to face interactions, with Diocesan Staff, Treasurers, Deanery Finance Chairs (8 responses, 6%)
- 8. Is there any information not currently available that you would like to see?**
- Further clarity on how the CMF is spent at Diocesan Level (25 responses, 19%)
 - Requesting information already available (16 responses, 12.5%)
 - No (37 responses, 28.5%)

Appendix 2

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Develop a rolling Common Mission Fund communications campaign

Recommendation 2 – Alongside the WDBF Annual Report and Accounts produce a simple A4 high level summary of the diocesan income and expenditure each year.

Recommendation 3 – To aid accuracy and accountability the Parish Portal be updated to include mandatory completion of the calculation form for Community of Worshippers as part of the submission. The submission must be digitally signed by the incumbent and churchwarden in addition to the member making the return.

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