

GENERAL SYNOD

DRAFT PAROCHIAL FEES ORDER 2024

Explanatory Memorandum

The draft Order prescribes the parochial fees payable for the period 1st January 2025 to 31st December 2026 in connection with marriages, funerals and burials and the erection of monuments in churchyards and in respect of other, miscellaneous matters.

Background

1. The draft Parochial Fees Order 2024 has been prepared and laid before the General Synod by the Archbishops' Council pursuant to sections 1 and 2 of the Ecclesiastical Fees Measure 1986 ("the 1986 Measure").
2. The 1986 Measure provides for the parochial fees payable to diocesan boards of finance and parochial church councils to be prescribed by a Parochial Fees Order for up to 5 years. Increases can be prescribed by reference to a published index of price or earnings increases. Schedule A1 to the 1986 Measure sets out in a list the matters in respect of which fees may be prescribed.
3. The draft Order prescribes parochial fees for the two-year period 1st January 2025 to 31st December 2026.

Policy considerations

4. The principles for setting the level of parochial fees were contained in GS 1813 and approved by the General Synod in 2011. In summary the principles are as follows:
 - Fees should be justifiable on the basis of some relationship to the actual costs incurred, taking account of real costs that cover most situations, for example training and paying clergy and maintaining church buildings.
 - There should be uniformity in the main fees specified so that people do not have to pay a different amount simply because their parish happens to be a particularly grand or costly building.
 - Extras charged by the parish should only apply where there is a genuine choice, for example music, bells flowers, additional printing, with all that is actually necessary for the service to take place being included in the statutory fee.
 - Whilst fees help offset the real costs of church buildings and authorised ministry, they need to be affordable and not set at a level that suggests the Church is trying to make money from its ministry. They should be a reasonable contribution towards the costs incurred and there should continue to be a right of waiver for those who cannot afford them.
5. In 2019, with a view to a new Parochial Fees Order covering the period 2020 to 2024, staff of the Archbishops' Council recalculated each of the parochial fees for which provision was then made by reference (as appropriate) to:
 - a clergy element (derived from the Central Stipend Authority's 'cost of clergy calculation' and the current methodology for arriving at the cost of ministerial training)

- a church maintenance element (taken from Research and Statistics figures derived from parish returns)
 - a churchyard element (taken from Research and Statistics figures derived from parish returns)
 - a secretarial rate (derived from publicly available information).
6. The recalculated figures were broadly in line with the parochial fees that were payable for the year 2019. Some were lower, some were a little higher. Overall, the recalculated figures demonstrated that the then payable figures were consistent with the principles approved by the General Synod in 2011. The 2019 Order was prepared on that basis.
 7. The 2019 Order provided for annual increases over its 5-year lifetime to be calculated by reference to the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). In February 2023, the General Synod approved an Amendment Order (The Parochial Fees (Amendment) Order 2023) which capped the annual increases in the fees at 5%. The view was taken that simply allowing increases in fees to take effect in accordance with CPI (which then stood at about 10%) would result in fees that were too high, taking account of pressures on the cost of living and that increases in clergy stipends (which are partly funded from fees) would not increase by as much as CPI.
 8. The base figures in the draft Order are the fees that are currently payable (i.e. in 2024) and therefore reflect the 5% cap that was applied in 2023. (An exception is the funeral fee where there is a service in church and the burial of the body, or the burial or other lawful disposal of cremated remains, takes place in a cemetery on a separate occasion. This is currently £83. It is proposed that the fee for this matter should be in line with the fees for other matters involving burial etc. in a cemetery (rather than a churchyard), which is currently £34.)
 9. Because of current uncertainty about how prices and other costs are likely to increase in the short to medium term, the Archbishops' Council is proposing an Order for just the next two years, rather than a five-year order (which is the maximum period allowed by the 1986 Measure).
 10. The fees for 2025 provided for in the draft Order are this year's figures increased by CPI as at August 2024, but with a cap of 5% (subject to rounding up to the nearest pound). The fees for 2026 will be the 2025 figures increased by CPI as at August 2025, again with a cap of 5% (subject to rounding).

The draft Order

11. **Article 1** of the draft Order contains formal provision concerned with the citation, commencement and interpretation of the Order.
12. **Articles 2 to 5 and Schedule 1** make provision prescribing the parochial fees for the years 2025 and 2026.
13. The table in Schedule 1 does not itself prescribe the fees that are payable. It sets out "base figures" which represent the level of parochial fees at current prices. The fees that will actually be payable will be ascertained by adjusting the base figures in accordance with the Consumer Prices Index (CPI), subject to a 5% cap, in the manner specified by article 4 of the Order. (See paragraphs 8 to 10 above.)
14. The relevant CPI figures will be published by the Office of National Statistics in September 2024 at which point Archbishops' Council staff will carry out the necessary calculations and

publish a table showing the fees that are payable for 2025. The 2026 figures will be ascertained and published in September 2025 in the same way.

15. In the unlikely event that CPI goes down (i.e. if there is deflation) the fees payable will remain at the same level as in the previous year.
16. **Schedule 2** contains incidental provisions that are to the same effect as those that were contained in the 2019 Order.

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