

GENERAL SYNOD**Enabling choice for clergy about their future retirement housing plans**

1. In November 2023, the Church of England Pensions Board (the Board) published discussion materials that invited reflections on how the Church might best support future cohorts of clergy with their retirement housing plans.
2. This note provides a brief overview to Synod of the proposals, updates members on the response to date, and sets out planned next steps.

Enabling choice

3. As stated by the Board's Chair at the last group of sessions the Board remains committed to making the current retirement housing support available to newly retiring clergy for as long as the Church is willing to fund it. In respect of retirement housing, substantial additional funding will be needed to sustain the service over the long term, given the impact of inflation, interest rates and increased demand. As a matter of good stewardship, the Board has started to consider how support around retirement housing might need to evolve for future cohorts of retiring clergy. The aim is to continue to serve clergy and the ministry of the Church well in future years.
4. In summary, the Board thinks there is an opportunity to shift from just offering one form of retirement housing support (directly provided housing offered at retirement, where needed), to a much broader range of services throughout ministry that would enable greater choice for clergy in relation to their retirement housing plans. This could include investment, support and guidance to encourage earlier planning and to overcome barriers to home ownership and open doors to a range of retirement housing choices. These new services would sit alongside a continued offer of Church housing, naturally needed by fewer over time as individuals take different routes and choices.
5. The full discussion paper is available at www.churchofengland.org/enablingchoice.
6. To reiterate, none of the ideas imply or require any change for those residents in Church retirement housing today.

The conversation so far

7. The Board has invited feedback on its ideas from serving clergy, ordinands, retirees, Dioceses and other groups through a structured online questionnaire.
8. More than 750 responses have been received, of which c.75% are from parochial clergy, 9% from retired priests, and 5% from those in training or connected with TEs. All Dioceses are represented, and about a third of all respondents are under 50 years old.
9. The online questionnaire closes on 31 January 2024 and at time of writing, feedback is still being received. Nonetheless, the broad themes heard so far include the following:

- a. The concept of enabling choice has resonated well, particularly where the focus is on moving away from 'one size fits all' to a more tailored approach. There is a strong pull in the feedback for earlier help with retirement planning, at different stages of ministry (building on work already underway by the Board and within Dioceses).
 - b. While the feedback highlights the diversity of personal circumstances and ministry situations experienced by clergy colleagues, many of the ideas resonated. In particular, there is most interest from younger clergy about ideas which may, in time, make home ownership more of a possibility than it is currently. This could include the Church partnering with mortgage providers, offering help with deposits, and taking other steps to support home ownership at different stages of life, where that is an aspiration.
 - c. Those closest to retirement (e.g. age 50 plus) feel they will have less time to benefit from some of the new services/choices proposed. Therefore there is understandable caution. How the Church might look after this group, will be a key consideration going into the next stage of work.
 - d. The adequacy of stipends has been cited frequently as a worry in relation to how well clergy feel able to prepare for the future. The ongoing need for the Church to continue to provide its own quality, retirement housing option to some retiring clergy, in one form or another.
 - e. For younger cohorts, the idea of financial health checks offered 10 years into ministry particularly resonates.
10. The Board is very grateful to all who have responded, for their candour, and willingness to share their insights and ideas. Further feedback has been gathered through webinars, emails, conversations and discussions with Church networks and bodies. These conversations have generated excellent questions and thoughts.
11. In January, the Board released a parallel survey to those yet to retire, inviting them to share more on their household circumstances and retirement plans. The information from this survey will also inform the shaping of new services and improve the picture of demand for help with retirement housing in the round.

Next steps

12. Over the coming weeks, the Board will carefully consider all feedback. Further insights will be shared with Synod members at the planned fringe meeting on Monday 26 February. Key themes will also be summarised and shared more formally later this year, including with all who responded. All feedback will help inform the development of detailed proposals and pace of change in time for resource allocation decisions for the 2026-8 triennium.

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