



**Strategic Framework Annual Cycle  
LISTENING PERIOD FINDINGS 2023**

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*Commissioned by Bishop's Strategy Integration Group*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The listening period is part of our Annual Cycle that helps to shape the Strategic Framework for the Diocese of Coventry. The listening period is designed to increase engagement, conversation, inform of opportunities for mission and ministry and give an increased awareness of needs at a parish level. It will feed into the 2024 strategic framework. Statistics and numbers have been used where possible and available but the time given to reading, listening and collating all the responses into themes, areas and sentiment is where this paper holds much of its value.

## 2. PROCESS

As part of the new annual cycle the listening period ran from January through to April 2023. As you can see in the diagram below there have been many avenues of input and contribution including; a Parish Needs Survey, the Archdeacons' Articles of Enquiry (2022), a number of days with workshops and collaborative sessions including a Vision & Strategy Day, Bishop's Council Day Conference and a BCST residential meeting. There has also been a number of individual correspondences with the Diocesan Secretary and the Diocesan Office.



A wide range of voices have been heard from many stakeholders across the diocese and it would fair to say whilst everyone has had the opportunity to contribute individually those who have not will have been represented either in region, post or tradition. For example, 1) Area Deans will have represented their region or 2) Churchwardens had a number of representatives at the Vision and Strategy Day.

### 2.1 Uptake

Overall the engagement with the Listening Period has been satisfactory enough to create some useful reporting. Whilst the uptake in some channels has only been around 25% it has been rich in content and insight, with balance being achieved via contributions from a wide range of stakeholders. Engagement at the in-person activities was always very enthusiastic.

### 3. FINDINGS



#### 3.1 Major themes

##### Children, young people & families

- A high level of intended engagement with 2023 focused support.
- Most HR interactions in the Parish Needs Survey were for support to employ children & family workers, illustrated further by the high levels of requested for support in 2024.
- Cited as a key area of opportunity for 'New Growth' in the diocese.

##### Specialist support

- The Parish Needs Survey indicated a significant increase in demand for core support, especially safeguarding.
- Cited as a key opportunity for 'Restored Health' amongst diocese of Coventry.
- A number of solutions and new working models were presented in emails, letters and workshops. Indicating a shortage or difficulty recruiting some more specific skills like HR and grant applications whilst a need for administrators to be shared across a number of churches makes fiscal sense.

##### Church buildings

- Running costs and building maintenance potentially not manageable for a majority of churches is a real risk highlighted in the Archdeacons' Articles of Enquiry.
- Featured notably as an area of opportunity in 'Restored Health' as it is a major concern for a significant percentage.
- Mainly positive interactions with the current team however fundraising and viability remain a challenge according to the Parish Needs Survey.

### Growing leaders

- Came through as a key theme at the Vision & Strategy Day.
- Workshops show more accessibility desired for lay and young people, non-ordination options.
- Seen as key enabling activity to release new worshipping communities, one of the higher intended engagement areas for 2023.

## 3.2 Rising themes

### Environment / Net Zero

- One of the highest levels of intended engagement with 2023 focused support.

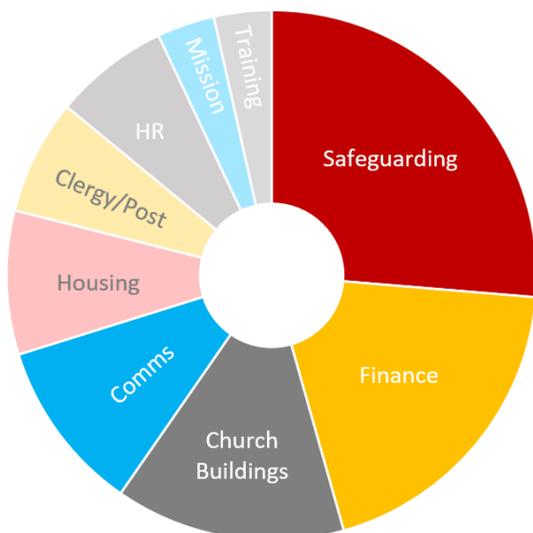
### Communications

- Awareness and visibility of support available and activities from the Diocesan Office.
- Building trust with clarity concerning finances and procedures.

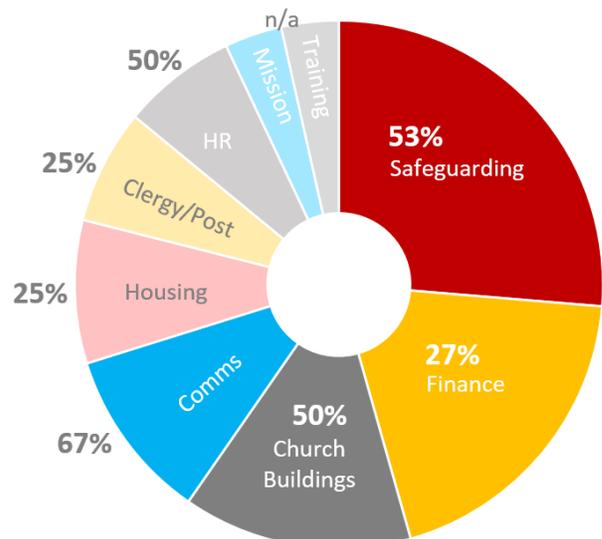
## 3.3 Core support from the Diocesan Office 2022

Opportunity to comment on this was met with high enthusiasm. The support received for the diocesan office had an **average score of 3/5** with gratitude and frustration shared in equal measure. The infographic below shows a) the percentage of engagement with various departments and b) the percentage of experiences that were positive.

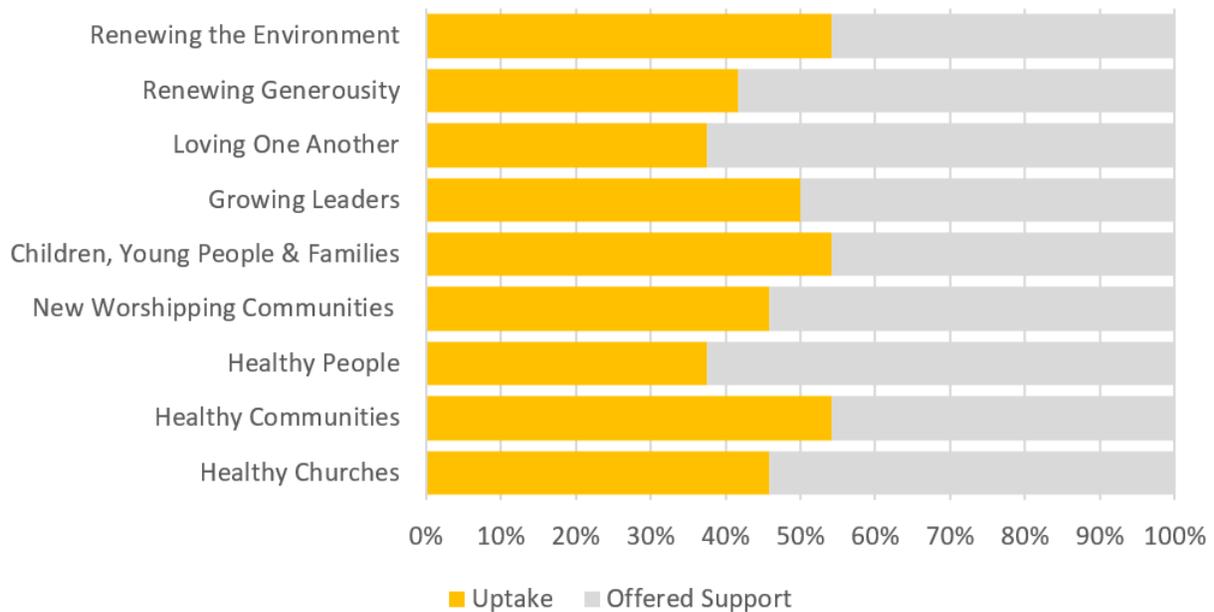
### a) Engagement with core departments



### b) Positive Experiences



### 3.4 Intended engagement with 2023 focused support



Although no area of focused support looks to have a particularly high uptake rate it is worth noting that 9 is a large selection so anything over 50% represents a popular choice with high intended engagement.

### 3.5 Perceived Areas for Opportunity in line with the 2030 vision

Below you can see the top perceived areas for opportunity in line with the 2030 vision. Block size is representative of frequency of mentions.

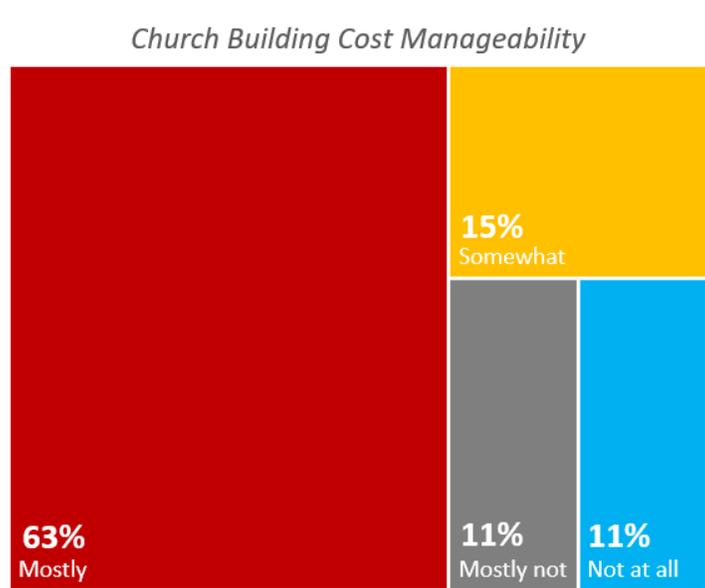


### 3.6 Desire Areas of Support for 2024



This data is collated from the 2023 Parish Needs Survey, 2022 Archdeacon’s Articles of Enquiry and workshop sessions.

The infographic below expands on the largest request for support in 2024, Church Buildings.



## 4. CONCLUSION

First, a note concerning the listening period itself. This has been the first iteration of the annual cycle for the Diocese of Coventry and there have been some encouraging levels of engagement and some learnings to take into the 2024 listening period. Increased uptake is expected next year as people get used to the cycle and it gains traction and trust. It can take between 3 and 5 years for organisations to fully embed an effective strategic process.

As for this year, the responses and data received have been honest and powerful, and this has proved to be a humbling and encouraging process for all who have been privileged to be involved. Some clear themes have come through by sheer volume, namely the 4 major themes but many individual insights have helped to shape these findings for which there is much gratitude. There are many prayers that this process will lead to increased good relationships and effective ministry and mission across the diocese. It's hoped that all are confident a fair variety of voices have been heard during this listening period.

### 4.1 Next steps

The next step in the annual cycle after the listening period is to budget, however before then there is need to write a proposed strategic framework for 2024 for consultation and consideration, below are some significant next steps that will help this listening process shape the next strategic planning period:

- **Formulate the 2024 strategic framework in response to the major findings;**
  - **The opportunities for ministry and mission with children, young people and families**
  - **The increasing impact of church building management**
  - **The desire for more leadership development and volunteer training**
  - **The growing need for more specialist support**
  
- **Increase awareness of the support available from the diocesan offices highlighting departments and personnel employed with expertise in various disciplines. Work to strengthen understanding around diocesan finances by providing clear communication.**



## 4.2 Hull and Sails

It may be useful for some to picture the Diocese of Coventry as a yacht heading out into the seas of ministry and mission. The hull could be seen as the central activity in diocesan office and the sails would be mission and ministry activity and initiatives. For effective sailing both the hull and the sails of a boat will need to be working well.

*“A boat without its sails up and rigged will not be going anywhere and a boat with a damaged hull will not be going very far.”*

Therefore, we must work to make sure we maintain a strong hull of core support and the sails of mission and ministry are well positioned and managed for effective sailing.

There's a growing sense of positivity and a feeling of a fresh chapter across the Diocese of Coventry with new people in post working hard to reduce any deficits, operate proactively and seek God for the future.

## 5. SOURCES

Access to the various listening activities can be made available on request.

*These include:*

- Parish Needs Survey.
- Summary notes from the Vision Strategy Day 9 Feb 2023.
- Workshop notes & worksheets from retreat days.
- Archdeacons' Articles of Enquiry 2022.
- Emails and letters in part.

*These exclude:*

- Whole versions of private emails and letters.
- Workshop notes that are not in relation to the listening period.