

A new approach to the old chestnut

Ordinarily, by September, the diocesan budget for the next year would have been set and agreed. However, in these strange and challenging times, normal has become abnormal, usual has become unusual and certainty has become uncertainty. Tim Llewelyn, Vice-Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, explains the strategy for 2021



Households, societies, charities and businesses up and down the country prepare a budget at some stage during the year but the current Covid-19 pandemic means that financial plans have to be revisited and reassessed.

Challenging times call for different approaches but different doesn't necessarily have to mean worse. Even before the onset of the pandemic, we, the Diocesan Finance Team, knew that we would need to adopt a fresh approach in the budget-setting process. An approach that sought to increase engagement with budget-holders and one that recognised that churches and Local Ministry Areas faced their own financial challenges.

Along with delivery of ministry, the diocese has many exciting plans, most of which, though, require funding to one degree or another. Delivering a balanced and affordable budget for 2021 has proved especially challenging and, in recognition of this, the Finance Team has embarked upon a series of engagement meetings with each budget-holder. We want to hear first-hand of not only the financial cost but also the very real missionary benefits that the various projects could create and deliver. We are also working closely with the Bishop and archdeacons to gain a much deeper understanding of their ministry and mission plans for both the diocese and archdeaconries. Achieving this greater insight will, it is hoped, help to deliver the balanced and affordable budget which, in turn, will support various aspects of diocesan life.

Whilst reviewing expenditure is key it is also timely that the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) has started to more fully explore other sources of sustainable income that will ultimately help to reduce its dependence on churches and support growth.

We know that there are no easy answers. However, we are confident that our new approach of greater engagement will help to engender a spirit of involvement rather than the budget-holder just being a recipient at the end of a process. The budget round will still be challenging. It may not unlock all the additional income that is needed nor, indeed, identify areas where expenditure can be cut, but we have faith that it will go some way to easing the financial pressures faced by the DBF, LMAs and churches.