Diocesan Investment Programme funding guidelines

Background

1. This paper contains the funding guidelines for the Diocesan Investment Programme.
2. Following the Diocesan Finance Review, the Archbishops' Council has allocated **£236m in 2026-28**. A further £574m has been indicated as being available across 2029-34.
3. The purpose of the Diocesan Investment Programme is to focus investment on enabling the bold outcomes and strategic priorities of the Church's Vision and Strategy to become a reality in parishes and communities, prioritising investment in the most deprived and resource-poor contexts.
4. The Diocesan Investment Programme should be considered alongside other funding made available for dioceses by the national Church, totalling over £200m in 2026-28. e.g.:
    1. **Formula-Based Time-Limited Funding** - a new fund worth £63m distributed to dioceses in 2026-28 on a formula basis to cover general costs.
    2. **Lowest Income Communities Funding** - increased to £133m in 2026-28, this provides ongoing support by formula for the costs of ministry in low income communities
    3. **Diocesan Investment Programme** (time-limited funding) – £37m in 2026-28 in financial support for dioceses with long-term sustainability plans.
    4. **People and Partnerships Funding** – £14m in 2026-28 for investing in partners that address specific key missional challenges across England.
    5. **National Giving Strategy** - support for diocesan giving advisors and wider support for stewardship.
    6. **Covering the costs of National Core functions** - a shift in 2026-28 has meant these costs are no longer borne by dioceses.

Purpose of the Diocesan Investment Programme

5. The Church's Vision and Strategy for the 2020s calls it to be a Church of missionary disciples, where mixed ecology is the norm and which is younger and more diverse. The Archbishops' Council has agreed that the bold outcome of doubling the number of young people is the 'priority of priorities'. The purpose of the Diocesan Investment Programme is to enable the Church of England's Vision & Strategy to become a reality in parishes and communities by providing funding to dioceses to support their mission plans, prioritising investment in the most deprived and resource-poor contexts.
6. In line with this purpose, dioceses are free to use the funding to:

- support the **development and revitalisation of existing Church ministry**,
- develop **new areas of mission**,

- **scale-up existing missional approaches** that are proving effective.

7. The fund seeks to achieve this by:

   - Taking a strategic development approach over the 12-year lifetime of the programme
   - Taking a tailored approach of funding and support to each diocese, recognising that different dioceses are at different states of development in their mission planning.
   - Giving diocesan leadership teams the time they need to work with parishes and deaneries to plan and discern what is needed to develop mission in their diocese.
   - Ensuring a transparent process for putting forward funding proposals and a prayerful assessment of those proposals

8. The Diocesan Investment Programme will operate within these principles:

   - **Relational & supportive** – Active partnership with diocesan and local church leaders, working together to enhance plans for sustainability.
   - **Transparent & honest** – Openness about decision-making processes, financial realities, and seeking the whole Church's good.
   - **Intentional** – Funding is linked to a plan setting out what change is anticipated and how it will be achieved.
   - **Empowering** – Those receiving funding are helped to build capacity so that they can be financially resilient.
   - **Evidence-based and realistic** – decisions about funding are based on high-quality evidence, with the understanding that those closest to the issues often know them best.
   - **Humility, recognising this is God's work** – Recognising success is dependent on God, excited and curious to learn what God will do, and trying to share our own skills with humility.

9. The funding supports dioceses to deliver mission across the whole diocese or to deliver proposals specifically focused on a geographical area and/or key demographic. The funding also provides short-term support to strengthen dioceses' capacity to develop their strategy.

Eligibility

10. The Diocesan Investment Programme is open to proposals from Church of England dioceses.

11. The Programme has gathered momentum during 2023-25 and demand for funding is now significantly exceeding supply. Maximum funding benchmarks, informed by population and wealth, have therefore been set by the Archbishops' Council for 2026-28 to give dioceses clarity before starting work on proposals. All dioceses with benchmarks are eligible to apply for Diocesan Investment Programme funding in 2026-28.

12. The Council has agreed that some dioceses should not be eligible to apply for funding in 2026-28, either because they have received funding for long-term plans in 2023-25, or because of their high investment assets and/or population income. Current plans for distribution will enable these dioceses to be eligible to submit proposals from 2029 onwards.

What is the funding for?

13. There is a tailored approach to investment for dioceses, where funding requirements will differ according to the progress of their strategy development.

14. Dioceses at the early stages of strategy development can seek **support for capacity** to create and deliver plans to develop the Church's mission.

15. Dioceses at the point of more advanced strategy development may seek **investment in targeted missional programmes**. This could mean running one, two or more change programmes focused on developing mission among key geographical areas or demographic groups. This will develop their mission, people and financial planning across the diocese, and strengthen further their change capacity.

16. Some dioceses will be seeking substantial **long-term funding to deliver a diocesan-wide strategy**. These dioceses will have seen learning and impact from multiple change programmes and will be in a position to develop a detailed strategy which sets out plans to transform mission across the whole diocese, and the additional people, capacity and other resources required.

17. Dioceses may also include smaller scale innovative projects which will generate learning about the Church's key mission challenges in moving towards delivering the bold outcomes of the Vision and Strategy.

18. Examples of what is funded by the Diocesan Investment Programme include:

    - Ordained leaders (including additional curates) and lay leaders (e.g. children's and youth workers, lay chaplains) required to ensure effective delivery of the diocese's proposal in churches and communities
    - Other resources needed to develop mission, e.g. leadership development and other training programmes; seed funding for churches to start new initiatives; investment in church buildings to strengthen mission and community outreach).
    - Posts required at diocesan level to ensure effective delivery of the programme (e.g. programme/project managers, training and development officers, mission enablers).

19. The Diocesan Investment Programme **cannot be used** for work covered by other national church funding streams with specialist advice (this includes giving advisors, racial justice advisors, the disability project, and net zero programmes). However, we encourage applicants to consider how these critical areas like racial justice and inclusion for those with disabilities can be woven into their programmes. The funding is **also not available** for general repairs or maintenance of church buildings.

20. In addition to the Diocesan Investment Programme's main fund, there is a time-limited sub-stream which is to act as bridge funding while the impact and increased financial sustainability of diocesan strategic plans come to fruition. The guidelines for the time-limited funding are available here.

Process for submitting a proposal

21. The funding operates through a trusted partnership approach. A Vision and Strategy (V&S) consultant, working on behalf of SMMIB, will support the diocesan leadership team through each stage of the process.

22. For a **capacity proposal**, the V&S consultant will work with the diocese to complete the template available on request. This will also require a budget completed in the format available here.

23. For a **programme proposal**, experience suggests that it takes a diocesan leadership team around 18 months to undertake the thinking and planning required.

24. As a first step, the diocese should agree a proposal timetable with their V&S consultant, who will be able to talk them through the different steps. These are outlined in the explanatory notes to these funding guidelines, to be found at the end of this file.

25. Throughout the proposal development, there will be opportunities to share learning and receive feedback. This should include one or more mission design meeting which may include participants from other dioceses.

26. At the time of submission, a diocese should produce:

    1. A **PowerPoint presentation** which tells the story of the diocese's strategy development and set out its mission plans and the investment required. This should include an **addendum** on key delivery issues.

    2. **Appendices** – including the programme budget and the **working documents** which the diocesan team needs to develop and deliver its plans.

    3. A 300-word **Executive Summary** in a Word document which will introduce the funding proposal to the SMMIB in its meeting papers.

27. Detail of the contents of these documents are also available in the explanatory notes. There are templates which should be used for the budget and outcome framework.

28. Together, these documents form the basis on which the Board decides. Proposals are discussed by NCI staff at a review panel meeting[1]. Collectively they highlight issues for the SMMIB's discussion and give a view on the extent to which the proposal meets the funding criteria.

29. Following this, the SMMIB assess proposals in the light of the funding criteria, taking account of the Review Group's recommendations. The Board will decide whether to approve the proposal and if any conditions should be attached to the grant award.

30. If the SMMIB make an award with conditions, these must be met before funding can be released. The SMMIB may also agree to indicate an amount to a diocese where

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[1] The panel meeting is chaired by the Head of Grants and includes the Director of Vision and Strategy, Deputy Director for Diocesan Support, Deputy Director for Insight and Engagement, Lead V&S Consultants, Executive Chair of the Diocesan Secretaries' Network, a representative of the Ministry Development Team, staff leads on governance and monitoring and evaluation, and grant operations managers. DST consultants also attend the meeting where a relevant diocese's proposal is being discussed. In addition, feedback is sought from relevant NCI teams (e.g. Finance, Giving, Buildings, Education).

they will consider further awards, subject to updated proposals to be brought back to the SMMIB for consideration and decision. This is known as an ‘award in principle’.

31. A Grant Management System is being developed using the Amp Impact platform, and is due for launch in 2026. Once in place these guidelines will update to reflect how documents are shared using that system. For now, they should be emailed to the DST consultant.

Funding criteria

32. The funding proposal will be assessed by the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board using the following criteria:

Does the proposal have a significant strategic impact aligned with the Church’s Vision & Strategy?

a. Scale of delivery against the bold outcomes:

- Doubling the number of children and young active disciples in the Church of England by 2030.
- A Church of England which fully represents the communities we serve in age and diversity.
- A parish system revitalised for mission so churches can reach and serve everyone in their community.
- Creating ten thousand new Christian communities across the four areas of home, work/education, social and digital.
- All Anglicans envisioned, resourced, and released to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the whole of life, bringing transformation to the church and world.
- All local churches, supported by their diocese, becoming communities and hubs for initial and ongoing formation.

b. The extent to which the proposal will help develop the diocese’s long-term strategy
c. The scale of the target population

Will the plans (mission, people and financial) achieve the anticipated outcomes?

Is there a clear mission design with an evidence and logic explaining why the proposed mission interventions will lead to the anticipated outcomes?

Does the overall capacity described give confidence in delivery?

a. Leadership and management capacity in place to deliver the proposed plans.
b. Track record of managing existing change programmes.
c. A robust plan for sustaining the work once national funding ceases.

Funding levels and payment profiles

33. The Archbishops’ Council has allocated £236m for the Diocesan Investment Programme in 2026-28. Within this there are restrictions for how much can be awarded in any given year.

34. Maximum funding benchmarks, informed by population and wealth, for 2026-28 and in principle maximum funding benchmarks for awards to be considered from the start of 2029 have been communicated to eligible dioceses.

35. Funding is awarded for programmes of up to nine years.

36. Remaining levels of funding will be communicated after each SMMIB meeting. The envelopes have been set so that there is sufficient funding to cover every diocese's envelope within this triennium.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Reporting requirements

37. All Diocesan Investment Programme awards will be given in the understanding that the diocese will take part in monitoring, evaluation, learning and reporting.

38. Dioceses should include an outcome framework in their proposal, using the template provided. This will set out the expected outcomes for the programme over time.

39. Dioceses should have robust governance in place to manage the programme. Each year, there will be an annual review with the DST consultant to look at progress made. The review will be a point to refine the plan for the next phase, enable capturing of learning for why something has or hasn't worked as planned, and clarify the budget for the next year.

40. One outcome of the annual review is a rating of green, amber-green, amber-red, or red. The rating is adjusted after each annual or relevant review process and shared with the SMMIB. When a project rating worsens the annual review would discuss what mitigations or course corrections should be put in place.

41. Where changes are required to ensure the effective delivery of the programme, a proposal can go through a change request or project reset process.

42. At the end of the work, an independent evaluation will be required and should be budgeted for. The independent evaluation will be shared with the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board and published on the Church Support Hub [for access by diocesan Programme Managers and senior leaders.

43. Further detail on each of these processes is available from the V&S consultant.

Governance

44. On behalf of the Archbishops' Council, the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board determines the distribution of funding for dioceses (Diocesan Investment Programme) and partner organisations (People and Partnerships Funding) in line with the Church's Vision and Strategy.

45. The Board:

    - Approves funding proposals
    - Ensures effective management of ongoing awards;
    - Oversees the impact of the funding through monitoring, evaluation and learning.

46. The Board is also responsible, through monitoring, evaluation and sharing of learning, for overseeing the effective delivery of active funds already allocated.

47. A list of members may be found here.

48. The Board meets four times a year (in February, June, October and December). It considers Diocesan Investment Programme proposals at three of these meetings.

49. The Board decides whether or not to approve the proposal and whether any conditions should be attached to the grant award. The Board may delegate authority to the Vision and Strategy team to assess the detailed delivery plans relating to the proposed investment and any conditions agreed by the Board.

50. Details of all the Board's programme awards are communicated following the Board's meetings and in the Board's annual report.

51. All awards are subject to the National Church Institutions' standard funding agreement which includes compliance requirements around safeguarding, financial due diligence, and data protection.

Support available and next steps

52. Please contact your Diocesan Support Team consultant for support before you begin work on developing your proposal for Diocesan Investment Programme funding.

53. Other contacts for the Diocesan Investment Programme and Vision and Strategy Team may be found here.