

Key Themes Across All Areas

1. Financial Sustainability & Giving

- Declining congregations post-COVID make Common Fund contributions difficult.
- Heavy reliance on older givers; younger generations give less.
- Fundraising alone is insufficient; more emphasis needed on legacies, stewardship teaching, and transparency about diocesan finances.
- Strong interest in modern giving methods (contactless, QR codes, direct debit, Parish Giving Scheme).
- Debate: Should Common Fund contributions be reduced, or should resources be strategically invested in mission and growth posts?

2. Buildings & Infrastructure

- Many church buildings are outdated and inaccessible (no toilets, heating, ramps, WiFi).
- Calls for **investment in sustainability and flexible spaces** so buildings can host mission and income-generating activity.
- Faculty (permissions) process seen as too slow and bureaucratic.
- Some areas suggested audits to assess which buildings are viable; others noted closure may be necessary in some cases.

3. Mission, Growth & Evangelism

- Clear priority: **children, youth, and family ministry** (dedicated workers, Messy Church, schools outreach, chaplaincy).
- Recognition that mission takes upfront investment before financial return.
- Encouragement of new worshipping communities, pioneers, social action projects, and digital outreach.
- Importance of connecting casual attendees/event supporters with ongoing discipleship and giving.

4. Clergy, Lay Leadership & Support

- High vacancy levels, especially in deprived/urban areas, causing instability.
- Suggestions:
 - Incentives for hard-to-fill clergy posts.
 - Deanery-level or shared roles (admin, youth, mission support).
 - Greater investment in lay leaders, administrators, and near-retired volunteers.
- Administration burdens (finance, HR, safeguarding, grants, graveyards) were highlighted everywhere as overwhelming for clergy.

5. Use of LINC/Common Fund

- Appreciation for LINC (Lowest Income Communities) support but questions about fairness and transparency.
- Concerns it may undermine mutual generosity.
- Proposals to target investment strategically (e.g. youth workers) rather than simply filling clergy vacancies.

6. Digital & Innovation

- COVID accelerated online engagement but confidence and infrastructure are uneven.
- Requests for:
 - IT training for clergy/volunteers.
 - Reliable WiFi/phone signal in rural areas.
 - Centralised digital tools for admin and mission.
 - Recognition of online presence as essential for visibility, rentals, and evangelism.

7. Community Relevance & Collaboration

- Strong push for listening to communities through surveys/consultations.
- Partnerships with businesses, charities, and ecumenical partners encouraged.
- Greater deanery identity and inter-parish collaboration seen as necessary but hindered by parochialism.
- Sharing of good practice, central initiatives, and external advice requested.

In Essence

Across Wolverhampton, Stafford, and Shrewsbury, the consultations show a **shared concern about sustainability**—financially, structurally, and in terms of people. The top priorities are:

- **Invest in people** (youth/family workers, clergy support, admin roles).
- **Make buildings fit for mission** (accessible, sustainable, flexible, digitally enabled).
- **Free up clergy and lay leaders** from admin so they can focus on mission.
- **Be strategic with funding**—direct LINC/Common Fund resources to growth and community impact, not blanket subsidy.
- **Strengthen collaboration and innovation** across parishes and deaneries, including digital presence and ecumenical working.