

Enabling Choice

New choices to support clergy with retirement housing

Your feedback - June 2024



Welcome





Dear Colleagues,

In November 2023, the Church of England Pensions Board published discussion materials that invited reflections on how the Church might best support future cohorts of clergy with their retirement housing plans. Our ideas to enable choice and support individuals to be in the driving seat of their retirement housing plan throughout their ministry journey are here: www.churchofengland.org/enablingchoice.

Thank you to all who took the time to offer their feedback on these ideas.

With more than 850 responses from across all dioceses, and from clergy at all stages of life, we now have a good picture of what support individuals and future clergy cohorts might need. This report outlines the key themes highlighted through written feedback and the great conversations that we had with so many during this period. We have also shared some of the insights gained from an accompanying survey of stipendiary clergy conducted in January 2024. This survey also prompted a huge response with valuable data shared on clergy circumstances and retirement plans.

Your feedback will help inform the shape of future services offered by the Church around retirement housing. We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rethink the package of support and ensure it is sustainable for the Church into future decades – and to offer new and different choices too, to enable clergy to find the right retirement housing option for their circumstances.

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. There is real appetite amongst clergy for more choice around their future retirement housing plans, with lots of interest in ideas to help support financial plans, enable home ownership, and encourage a regular rhythm of quality conversations across ministry. These new choices will require investment – as too will the continuation of a quality Church retirement housing scheme, which we see as an essential part of the future. Your feedback has helped us shape what the package of future support might be so that this can be considered alongside other resource allocation priorities starting this autumn.

We will update you on this work as major steps are agreed.

In the meantime, if you are due to retire within the next few years and might need help with retirement housing, please get in touch with our team at housingservices@churchofengland.org.

Thank you again for your feedback.

Clive Mather, Chair John Ball, Chief Executive

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each year, around one in six retiring clergy move into retirement homes offered by the Church of England Pensions Board.

In November 2023, the Board published ideas for how the Church might rethink the model of support with retirement housing for future clergy cohorts; with an aim to enable choice and put clergy in the driving seat of their retirement housing plans much earlier in ministry.

Over 850 colleagues offered feedback on these ideas, through a structured online questionnaire, webinars, emails and conversations. Additionally, more than 1,300 stipendiary clergy contributed to a parallel survey designed to understand more about clergy circumstances and retirement plans.

Key themes across both surveys include:

- Strong support for the concept of enabling choice, with 87% of respondents welcoming more options and choice around their retirement housing plans.
- The feedback highlighted the diversity of personal circumstances and ministry situations experienced by clergy colleagues.
- Many of the ideas proposed resonated, including:
 - Support for planning which starts earlier and runs throughout ministry – with a clear desire for advice that is both personalised and in-person.
 - ✓ A pull for more agency and responsibility at an individual level.
 - Younger respondents were particularly interested in any help which put home ownership in reach for those living in tied accommodation or on a stipend.

- A strong belief that the Church should do more to signpost to, partner with and make connections with expert providers who can offer new/more choice to clergy.
- There were also repeated areas of concern, including:
 - ? The adequacy of stipends and future pension provision were cited in a number of responses, along with the challenges of managing financially with everyday bills. Around 35% of clergy who responded to the retirement planning survey said they were just getting by, with a further 20% saying they had been finding it difficult to manage in recent months.
 - ? Those closest to retirement felt they will have less time to benefit from some of the new services/choices proposed. There is understandable caution and concern about the impact of any proposed changes for those closest to retirement.
 - ? The importance of the provision of quality Church retirement housing to clergy wellbeing which is understood by the Board. The retirement planning survey showed that up to 23% of clergy in ministry today could be relying on the Board for help with retirement housing. This is a higher proportion than the Board has seen in recent years through applications to Church Housing.

This feedback will be used to inform the design of future services and support offered to clergy with their retirement housing plans. Specifically, this will help inform proposals into upcoming national Church funding discussions.

TAKING FORWARD FEEDBACK OUTSIDE OF OUR REMIT

Responses inevitably at times talked about 'The Church' in the round or touched upon other aspects of the remuneration package. Many of these matters are of course intertwined – for instance, stipend levels not only affect the day-to-day financial wellbeing for clergy now, but also pensions and future housing plans. The Board will share feedback it has received around stipend, pension adequacy and tied housing with the bodies responsible for setting policy in this area. In the meantime, we will use the feedback received here to ensure that the proposals around future retirement housing allow clergy to retire well.



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Background

Help with retirement housing today

The Church of England Pensions Board supports retiring clergy to find the right home for their retirement, where needed, through:

- The offer to rent a home, from a portfolio of properties we already own. These properties are usually 2-3 bedroom houses, let on an assured lifetime tenancy basis and at a below-market rent.
- An opportunity to join one of our Community Living schemes, which offer residents their own flat, while having a supportive Christian community right on the doorstep.
- Help, guidance and support to explore options with a range of other providers, including exploring later life home ownership routes.

Today around one in six retirees require help each year. The shape of the support with retirement housing has evolved over the decades, in response to changing needs and circumstances.

Why consider a change?

As set out last year, there are six reasons:

- Clergy are asking for more help with planning ahead: while some clergy have their plans for the future all set, concerns about how to manage in retirement are a worry for others.
- **2. Demand for help will grow over the coming decades:** particularly as stipendiary clergy may be less likely in future to be property owners as they reach retirement.
- **3. Good stewardship of Church resources:** keeping today's retirement housing offer will require substantially more ongoing funding from the Church. As a matter of good stewardship, we need to consider if there might be a more cost-effective way of offering support.
- **4. More tailored support and options are needed:** the current model of Church retirement housing was set up at

- a time when clergy households were more typically 'cleric plus one'. That doesn't easily match with the increasing diversity of family situations.
- 5. Ministry is becoming more diverse: while there continues to be a very important role for stipendiary ministers in the life of the Church, ministry patterns are changing. For some, the exercise of vocation in the future may well involve moving between stipendiary service and ministry in secular employment; perhaps more use of housing allowances, etc.
- **6. There are more alternative options available:** compared to even ten years ago, there are more providers and more potential choices to support clergy retirement housing plans.

Proposals to enable choice for future cohorts

Our ideas to rethink the model of support focused on the opportunity for the Church to better enable choice for clergy around future housing plans, through a shift from putting all the effort into help with housing at retirement, to investment, new services and initiatives throughout ministry that put clergy in the driving seat of their retirement journey. Ideas were set out to:

- Spark planning ahead and encourage saving, with regular conversations, support and services throughout ministry.
- Enable home ownership during ministry by overcoming barriers to level the playing field between clergy and their peers.
- Open doors to different retirement housing options, working with faith-based and market providers.
- Continue to offer quality Church retirement homes to those for whom fewer other choices are available, but with an aim that this is the case for fewer clergy over time.

To read more about our ideas and the case for change, please go to www.churchofengland.org/enablingchoice

Inviting feedback

The Board invited feedback on its ideas to enable choice about future housing plans from serving clergy, ordinands, retirees, dioceses and other groups. These views were primarily obtained through a structured online questionnaire.

819 responses were received from across the Church through this questionnaire. Of these, 77% were from stipendiary clergy, 8% from retired priests, and 5% from those in training or connected with Theological Education Institutions.

A further 32 email responses were received (usually where someone only wanted to answer a few questions), along with five responses from Church bodies or associated organisations and networks.

Across the individual online responses, respondents covered all age groups, with about a third being under 50, and all dioceses were represented.

In addition, the Board invited stipendiary clergy who had not yet retired to take part in a survey designed to gather a clearer picture of clergy household circumstances and current retirement plans. This survey was delivered by an independent research agency, Eido.

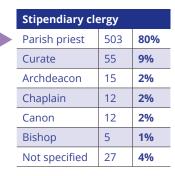
The survey asked some demographic questions of respondents e.g. age, distance to go to retirement, current household make-up. A further set of questions explored their current financial and housing circumstances with specific questions on housing ownership, household income and total savings. The final set of questions explored the extent to which respondents had prepared for retirement, and how far they are likely to rely on the Church for support with their housing once they retire.

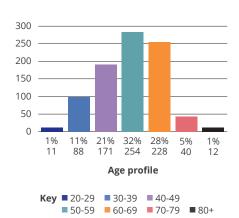
More than 1,380¹ complete or partial responses were received to this second survey – which is a great response rate compared to 7,500 active members of the clergy pension scheme. The majority of responses were received from stipendiary clergy in incumbent roles (82% of survey respondents). Notably, this further survey included a higher proportion of responses from those aged 56 and over (58% of all responses), although we heard too from clergy at younger ages.

This report looks at key themes by survey in turn, supported by data analysis and example quotes from respondents.

Breakdown of responses to Enabling Choice

Role	No.	%
Ordained priest (stipendiary)	629	77%
Retired priest	67	8%
In training (for stipendiary role)	24	3%
Clergy partner or family member	20	2%
Diocesan role	16	2%
Ordained priest (self-supporting)	12	1%
Theological college	7	1%
Part of my local Church	5	1%
Charity/Organisation member	3	0%
NCIs (all)	2	0%
Lay minister	1	0%
Other	20	2%
Prefer not to say	13	2%





^{1.} Given the level of response, Eido felt that the survey was fairly representative of the clergy population, with 'the margin of error for the majority of questions within a 3% margin of error at a 95% confidence interval.' EIDO Research 2024.

Responses to questions on enabling choice

Introductory questions

The question we asked	Possible (options
Q1. Do you support the concept of enabling	Yes	87%
choice for clergy, so that they have more options and choice about their retirement housing plans?	No	2%
	Unsure	11%

As well as selecting from the options above, respondents were asked to give reasons for their answer. Key themes included:

- Ministry today can be more varied than a decade ago, with more clergy undertaking different types of roles across their ministry journey. Clergy circumstances too are more varied. This means that a 'one size' model of support no longer fits all and it is right that the service evolves. "Our personal circumstances continue to change as time goes on. Everyone's situation is different, so the more flexibility the better."
- Clergy want more options and choices than those currently available, with many respondents welcoming a life-long support process, all through ministry.
- Some felt that with choice comes ownership of your future and personal empowerment. Most respondents, and particularly those earlier in ministry, were keen to take ownership of their retirement plans with appropriate support from the Church. "Clergy have so little power over their living accommodation in stipendiary ministry, it is right that they should be empowered to make decisions on their needs for accommodation afterwards."
- There was a concern that any new choices must be adequately resourced and genuinely affordable to clergy.



The q uestion we asked	Possible (options
Q2. Do you agree that the Church should prioritise offering help with retirement housing plans to stipendiary clergy who are reliant on tied accommodation?	Yes	88%
	No	3%
	Unsure	8%



Similarly, respondents were asked to give reasons for their answer. Key themes included:

- Stipendiary clergy should be supported with help with retirement housing where needed, as they are reliant on tied housing during their ministry.
- Some commented that living in tied housing can create additional challenges in the transition to retirement, e.g. needing to plan for and make a move at the point of retirement.
- Some respondents also felt that the Church has a responsibility to support its clergy well, both in ministry and into retirement, recognising the vocational and, at times, sacrificial nature of ministry.
- There was a concern to ensure that support with retirement housing recognises particular challenges for those in different circumstances, such as single parents and single-income households.
- We heard feedback from some colleagues who had owned a property prior to ordination and had needed to sell that home to enter ministry, with a concern that they continue to be well supported by the Church into retirement.
- A minority of respondents would like to see more help for self-supporting colleagues, with a view that help with retirement housing should be based on need rather than type of service.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

There is clear support for doing more to enable new and different choices for clergy in their retirement housing plans. Help with housing should be based on need and recognise the range of circumstances that exist, but with a particular focus retained on stipendiary clergy.





Sparking planning ahead and encouraging saving

Respondents were invited to consider a set of ideas that might spark planning ahead and encourage saving, and then to respond to:



Q3: Which of these ideas do you think might have most impact in sparking planning ahead and encouraging saving? (Respondents were able to choose more than one answer)

Once 10 years into ministry, all stipendiary clergy could be offered an individual 'financial health check'	82%
Offering a kick-start to saving, for example a lump sum	70%
Providing guidance on long- term financial health and wellbeing questions, including housing, to consider through the discernment process	63%
Embedding questions around planning ahead in Ministry Development Reviews	50%
Offering in-person and online seminars about financial planning at key points in early ministry	45%
Expanding the current email prompts to members around key birthdays/milestones, to offer invitations to webinars, events and materials to help with 'talking money'	38%
None of the above	5%

For more information on these ideas, please see page 10 of the <u>Enabling Choice discussion document</u>.

Key themes from respondents who shared written feedback included:

- Many of the ideas were supported, with respondents commenting that it was easy to see how one intervention would build on another.
- The idea of support with saving was welcomed, although some respondents questioned whether the amount offered would be sufficient to help with housing deposits, where that is someone's aspiration.
- Respondents expressed a concern that support should be coordinated and joined-up across dioceses, so that clergy in one part of the country get a similar experience to those in another. They also commented that support should build on good practice that already exists within dioceses.
- Many reiterated the need for the Church to offer a range of support and solutions to suit the different needs and circumstances of clergy. There was a very strong preference for support that was personalised and ideally in person i.e. you could pick up the phone and speak to someone easily, or be able to access help and expertise on financial matters locally. Similarly, these conversations need to support clergy well with day-to-day challenges now, as well as covering future plans.
- Clergy felt that conversations across ministry should cover managing pensions/AVCs, home ownership, inheritance, and coping with unexpected changes of circumstances.
- Some respondents asked that advice and guidance be offered more frequently in early ministry than proposed in these ideas, or be made available 'as and when needed' in order for clergy to be able to take more ownership of how and when they started to access different forms of support. "These proposals are vital for younger clergy who don't see their retirement as an immediate concern but who need help to realise both how fast it will come around and how difficult it is to make suitable provision for it."
- Others were concerned that if too many of the conversations proposed at different stages of life were presented as 'optional,' it would be too easy to push planning for the future aside.

Respondents weren't sure about how retirement/financial planning discussions might easily fit within the Ministerial Development Review structure.

We also asked: "What other ideas might be considered?" (Q4). Specific ideas suggested by respondents included:

- Introducing an individual 'retirement housing plan' from the outset, which is reviewed annually and adjusted as circumstances change.
- Offering dedicated support for the home-buying process for those who have not experienced it before. For example a helpline, an idea-sharing platform, or peer-to-peer mentoring.
- Facilitating support groups for those near retirement or sharing case studies from those who have 'retired well'.

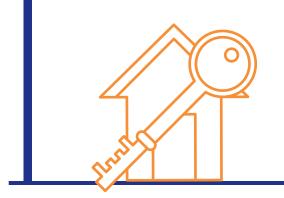
These ideas all naturally build on those already set out, and we are exploring how we might make them a reality.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Clergy, on the whole, would welcome more support at different stages of ministry about money and housing matters, to help with planning ahead. There is a strong preference for support that is personalised and in-person where possible.

Enabling home ownership during ministry

Respondents were invited to consider a set of ideas that might enable home ownership during ministry, and then to respond to:



Q6: Which of these ideas do you think might have most impact in enabling home ownership? (Respondents were able to choose more than one answer)

Partnering with mortgage providers to develop products that understand clergy circumstances and overcome hurdles towards building deposits	81%
Offering a means tested contribution of c.£20,000–25,000 towards a deposit on a first-time buyer mortgage	77%
Working with providers to highlight existing home ownership products that can be adapted for those in tied accommodation	71%
There is a role for the Church in building up – and making visible – details of where to turn to access some of these services, so that clergy have the best possible advice	69%
Offering/brokering guidance on how to be a responsible landlord, if you buy a home while in ministry and rent it out	61%
None of the above	5%

For more information on these ideas, please see page 12 of the <u>Enabling Choice discussion document</u>.

Key themes from respondents who shared written feedback included:

- There was strong interest in steps to support home ownership, particularly from younger clergy. It is clear that there is a real desire and demand for access to home ownership, which is harder for stipendiary clergy in tied accommodation than perhaps it is for other occupations. Practical support from the Church for clergy in getting onto the housing ladder, where not already a homeowner, was welcomed by those who felt it was something they would like to consider. "I'm in my mid-thirties and supporting my family on my stipend alone – I'm trying to save with a view to getting a mortgage in the next ten years or so, but this seems almost impossible. Any help in securing a mortgage or a grant towards a deposit would be incredibly helpful, as banks and government saving schemes seem not to understand our position."
- Some respondents felt that home ownership would create more positive options for later life and that a 'home of their own' might provide support with later care needs or create a legacy for family.
- Clergy also supported the role the Church could play in developing financial products and helping to overcome a level of uncertainty about the unfamiliar. There was particular interest in ideas around partnership with mortgage providers.
- Clergy asked that we consider solutions for all circumstances, including where both spouses are on a stipend, or where a group of friends might like to buy property together.
- The idea of the Church doing more to signpost to specialists who can help clergy navigate both buying a home and the responsibilities of being a landlord was welcomed.
- It was acknowledged in many responses that home ownership isn't for everyone. Some clergy felt that "owning a home while living in tied accommodation is an added responsibility which impacts on ministry".
- Stipend levels were highlighted as a challenge by many, with a particular concern that where the stipend is the main source of income, clergy would struggle to save towards a home of their own.

We asked: 'What other ideas might be considered?' (Q7). A number of additional ideas were mentioned, including:

- A help-to-buy type arrangement for clergy to help bridge the gap towards a deposit through a low-interest loan.
- Creating a Church savings scheme to support clergy in saving towards deposits.
- Considering potential partnerships with banks and others to help clergy access good home ownership options at retirement.
- Changing the model around tied accommodation in favour of housing allowances.

Some of these are beyond the Board's remit, e.g. changes to tied accommodation. Others are being considered as part of the next stage of work.

A note on means testing

With these ideas, and with the ideas around a 'kick-start to saving' considered earlier, we asked whether any direct financial support from the Church should be means-tested (Q5, Q8). There were similar responses across both questions.

Whilst on balance, most respondents could see the need for the Church to target funding appropriately, there were concerns from some about means testing, **as shown overleaf.**

Key themes included:

- Those who already have property or have substantial savings wouldn't need the support. Therefore, limited Church funds should be prioritised to those most in need.
- Some felt that means testing was the fairest approach for all: "The funds aren't limitless and it is better that those who need help get enough help to make a real difference, than everyone gets a bit of help which doesn't make a huge difference to anyone" with particular reference to the idea of this being 'in line with kingdom values'.
- Others pointed out that anyone applying for a mortgage is means tested and suggested that the approach should mirror that used by any financial services institution.
- Some respondents thought that the kick-start to saving should be offered to all, given this was proposed at such an early stage of ministry, with those who didn't need it proactively 'opting out.'
- A number observed that means testing could be costly and possibly intrusive and that perhaps it might put some clergy off applying.
- Some felt there was a risk that means testing for some ideas might disincentivise steps households are already taking to prepare for the future. "It depends on the 'means' to be tested. If clergy find themselves penalised for having diligently saved money carefully sliced from their meagre stipend, then this would be manifestly unfair. On the other hand, clergy who have inherited wealth, from any source, should not be able to access such grant support."
- Some respondents thought that much depended on the type of financial support eventually offered by the Church. "If it is a grant, then yes it should be means tested, but if it is a loan, then it shouldn't. Personally, I think a loan is more affordable for the Church and preferable, although I realise this has its own issues."



KEY TAKEAWAYS

There was a lot of interest in support with home ownership, particularly amongst younger clergy, while recognising this won't be appropriate (or the aim) for everyone. This makes it important to have a holistic package of support.





Opening doors to different retirement housing options

Respondents were invited to consider a set of ideas that might help open doors to different retirement housing options, and then to respond to:

Q9: Which of these ideas do you think might have the most impact in opening doors to a range of options as clergy head towards retirement? (Respondents were able to choose more than one answer)

A small team which can offer one-to-one conversations to stipendiary clergy, 10 years out from retirement, with good quality information offered in-person and online	90%
For those with some capital, clear signposting to later-life home ownership options, some of which are available from age 55	81%
For those with lower savings or who do not wish to explore home ownership routes, clear signposting to the range of retirement rental options that may be available	80%
Signposting to external products and services that support financial plans	70%
None of the above	4%

For more information on these ideas, please see page 14 of the <u>Enabling Choice discussion document</u>.

Key themes from respondents who shared written feedback included:

- There was very strong support for any help the Church could offer in the immediate run-up to retirement to help clergy consider different plans, with a view that a 1-1 conversation at least ten years from retirement (if not 15 years) would be incredibly helpful to many. "As someone who is 56 I would absolutely welcome the opportunity to talk about future possibilities. I don't know what's out there and would be grateful for help."
- 83% of respondents agreed that the Church should provide signposting and guidance to clergy so they are informed about the range of home ownership and rental choices available to them at retirement, rather than just assuming a Church-provided property is the best route for all. Feedback around this particularly highlighted the variety of clergy circumstances and retirement plans and that looking at a range of options might be helpful to retirees. "The best interests of clergy should always be considered so all reasonable options should be on the table when provision of a home on retirement is being considered."
- There was a commonly reported theme that informed choice is a good thing. "Receiving early and targeted information is always appreciated. Waiting to tackle a big financial decision is not wise and leads to a great deal of stress and strain. Signposting and guidance would be an encouragement to me to be actively engaged in my future living situation."
- Others noted that some clergy are interested in getting on the housing ladder in later life and would welcome more information about different routes and options on this.
- We had a number of responses from those currently 15 years or less from retirement, who were concerned that they may not have time to take advantage of many of the new ideas proposed in earlier sections. They wanted to ensure that they and others in a similar situation have access to as much tailored support as can be offered.

- There was a concern from some respondents that these conversations are effectively resourced, to offer a consistent experience across dioceses and to clergy retiring at different times.
- Some clergy were keen to emphasise the need for robust agreements to be in place with any thirdparty providers to help smooth the path of making applications, and ensure clergy are accessing quality options.
- There was concern from some about the challenge of preparing for retirement and exploring options alongside a full and busy ministry. "Please bear in mind the lack of time that we have in ministry to do these sorts of things. Any solutions need to be fairly straightforward as our focus is on active ministry and leaves little space for long-term planning."
- Respondents were keen to ensure that a Churchprovided property would still be considered alongside other choices.

We asked: "What other ideas might be considered?" There were two recurring key themes here, to help inform the next stages of work:

- Consideration of whether some financial help could be given on retirement to help clergy with future housing plans.
- ✓ A desire for grants and help with the transition into retirement, e.g. moving costs.

Since launching Enabling Choice, the Board has been working with potential housing applicants to begin to explore a broader range of housing choices as envisaged in this section. It has been particularly pleasing to see a number of clergy households realise their dream of housing ownership at retirement by pointing them to advice and types of products and services of which they had previously not been aware.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

There was strong support for a range of tailored advice, guidance and signposting for those nearing retirement – both on support with home ownership and exploring other housing options.

Offering quality Church retirement homes



This section was slightly different in that it asked clergy to reflect on the need for today's retirement housing support and options to potentially evolve the offer for future cohorts.

Almost all respondents (94%) answered 'yes' to 'do you agree that there will continue to be a need for the Church to provide its own retirement housing option to some retiring clergy?' Key themes included the challenge of planning ahead when circumstances change across life. There was also particular concern for those that might need to retire early due to ill-health. A significant number of respondents were also due to retire within the next five to ten years and were concerned that they would still have access to a quality Church offer.

The Board believes there will always be those who, despite the other options, need a Church-provided retirement home. Those homes should be safe, well-maintained and suitable for retirement living, which will require appropriate ongoing funding from the Church.

We also know that directly provided housing is costly for the Church, and meeting the demand from future retirees will require substantial additional funding. Accordingly, through the conversation we invited respondents to consider a question of: If it was necessary to change the direct offer to make it more affordable for the Church in the future, which of these options would you support? (Respondents were able to choose more than one answer)

Offering smaller properties to retirees	72%
Taking account of household income as well as savings in considering eligibility for subsidised Church housing	69%
Fixing tenancy start dates so that the tenancy starts by an agreed date (even if household plans then change)	47%
Increasing the minimum length of service required to qualify for subsidised Church housing	45%
Focusing on offering properties in more affordable parts of the country	42%
Reviewing the minimum length of service required to qualify for subsidised Church housing after ill-health retirement	36%
Reviewing the extent of rent subsidy on new tenancies	34%

For more information on these ideas, please see page 16 of the <u>Enabling Choice discussion document</u>.

Key themes from respondents who shared written feedback included:

- While respondents understood the challenges of sustainability, a 'safety net' housing offer is required particularly for those for whom fewer other choices are available.
- Three clear priorities emerged in the feedback:
 - To provide properties across the country, allowing clergy to retire close to family and friends. "Clergy need to be treated well, and allowed to retire near their family, or close friends if they have no family."

- To consider affordability of properties

 in that context, most respondents could
 see the case for ensuring properties are
 right-sized for retirement, e.g. not too
 big to heat/manage, although some
 expressed caution that homes still needed
 to accommodate a range of household
 circumstances.
- To ensure support is targeted to those in the most need, i.e. without the means to explore other options, for example to those on lower incomes, and/or for whom plans have changed unexpectedly.
- The importance of providing a choice of homes was also noted "I think clergy want more freedom of choice. We've not been able to choose where we live up till this point. I can't wait to choose my own house!" although some respondents recognised that choice could not be unlimited.
- There was concern from those closest to retirement about the timing of any change. We asked for views around the length of transition through this question (Q14): "If any of these changes to the Church's direct housing offer were to be made, what would be an appropriate and fair period for transition from today's arrangements, assuming that funding would be available?" Just over 60% of respondents felt that five to ten years was an appropriate transition period for any changes to Church housing to be implemented. "Five to ten years of transition gives people who are currently closer to retirement time to adjust their savings and plans for retirement."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

There will continue to be a place for a quality Church retirement housing offer for those for whom fewer other choices are available. It will be important to balance the introduction of new services with a tailored package of support for those approaching retirement in the near term. It is important that church-provided housing is affordable for households as well as the Church.

The Retirement Planning Survey

The retirement planning survey took place in parallel to the Board seeking views on Enabling Choice and received 1,280 full responses and a further 90 partial responses.

This survey was designed to give a clearer picture of clergy circumstances and aspirations for the future, and to inform the demand for support with retirement housing.

Here are some of the key data points:

Clergy household income

30% of clergy households responding to the survey were relying on the stipend as their main source of income. Looking at the latest data available, the national average stipend in payment at the time the survey was undertaken was £29,240, rising to £30,990 by April 2024².

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The most significant learning from this survey is that more clergy may need help with retirement housing than previously forecast. The survey reinforced that there is significant appetite for help from the Church with home ownership plans. There are also concerns about clergy financial wellbeing amongst certain groups.

Household annual income

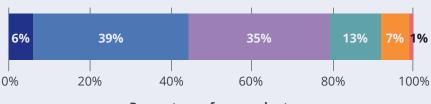
This graph tells us the annual income of households (before tax and deductions, and including any benefits/allowances). "Below £10,000" and "£10,000-20,000" are likely to be individuals undertaking part-time roles



We were also keen to better understand how clergy were managing financially, particularly in light of ongoing challenges with the cost of everyday living.

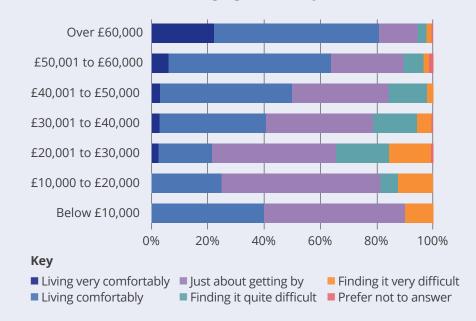
45% of respondents reported that over the last six months they were living comfortably or very comfortably. 20% have been finding it either quite or very difficult to manage financially. There was a clear correlation between ability to manage financially and income levels.

How well would you say you have been managing financially over the last 6 months?



Percentage of respondents

How well someone is managing financially vs household income



^{2.} This is the average calculated based on diocesan basic stipends weighted by the number of stipendiary clergy in each diocese. It is higher than the National Minimum Stipend. There are some differences across dioceses. For instance, as of April 2024, the highest diocesan basic stipend in payment was £32,292, while the lowest was £29,971.

Savings

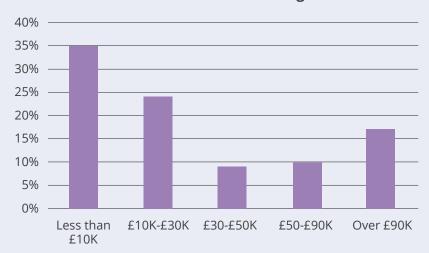
More than a third of clergy have less than £10,000 in savings, and more than 50% have less than £30,000 – covering clergy at all ages.

The strongest interest in support towards home ownership is from these groups, e.g., an average of 80% of those with lower savings said they were interested in help in this area, compared with an average of 72% across those with more savings.

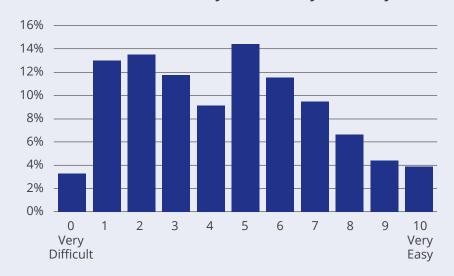
80% of those who said they were 'living comfortably' in the earlier section said they found it relatively easy to save – and the converse is true.

A significant proportion of those closer to retirement had good savings levels: 34% of those over 55 years of age who shared their savings details had over £50,000 in savings – which may already be part of them preparing well for the future, giving them more choices.

Value of household savings



On a scale of 1-10, how would you describe your ability to save?



Property ownership

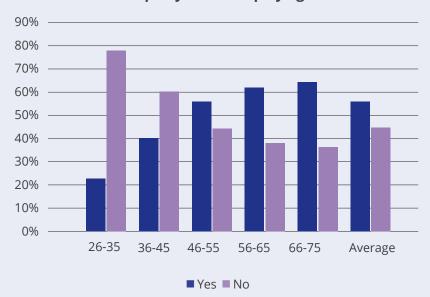
56% of clergy in ministry today own a property.

In 2021, the Clergy Remuneration Review asked a similar question as part of its fact-finding survey. That suggested that c.60% of those in ministry today owned property, which points to a decline in the last few years. This might be the first sign of a downwards trend in property ownership, driven by challenges of property price growth for younger generations, although it could be due to differences in respondents.

There are still high levels of property ownership in those with 10-15 years to go to retirement.

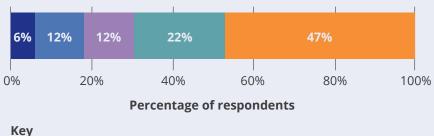
Of those who don't own a home, 78% would want to if they did have the means, with 19% reporting it would depend, and only 3% saying they would not.

Property ownership by age



Likelihood of home ownership

This graph shows how likely participants think it is that they will own a home by the time they retire

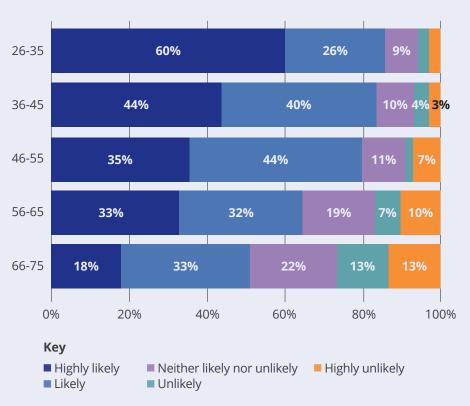


Key
Highly likely
Neither likely or unlikely
Highly unlikely
Unlikely

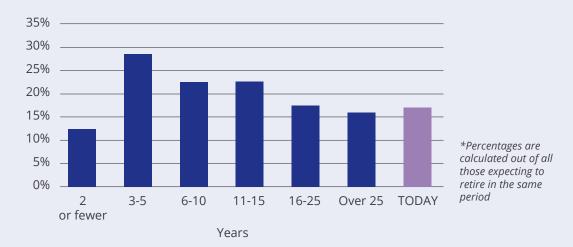
Stipendiary Clergy who do not currently own a home were also asked how likely they would be to make use of a potential offer from the Church of financial support towards becoming a homeowner during ministry. 72% of respondents said they would be likely to make use of such an offer. 15% responded neutrally, while 13% are unlikely to make use of such an offer.

Those who are younger were more likely to accept a potential offer from the Church of financial support towards becoming a homeowner during ministry than those who are older, with 86% of those who are currently 26-35 years old saying they would likely make use of this support, compared to 51% of those who are currently 66-75 years old.

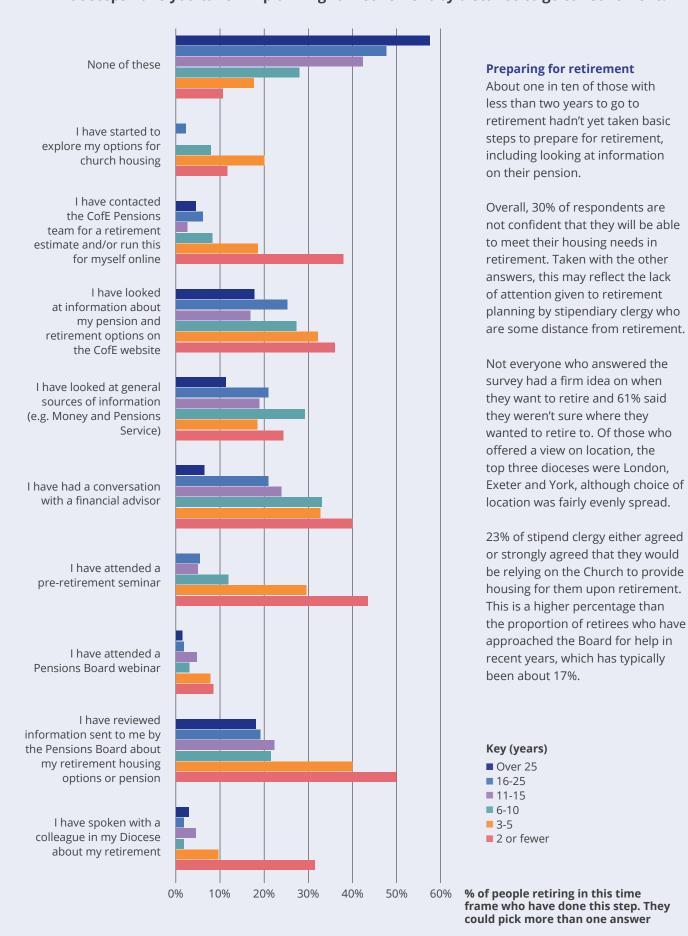
Likelihood of making use of any proposed financial help towards becoming a home owner during ministry, broken down by age



"I expect to live in retirement accommodation provided with the help of the Church" by distance to go to retirement*



What steps have you taken in planning for retirement by distance to go to retirement?





What happens next

Thank you again to all who responded to the retirement planning survey and who offered their views to the discussion around Enabling Choice. This report offers a glimpse of the depth and breadth of feedback shared with the Board, and which will help shape the future of the support offered with retirement housing.

We have spent the weeks since these conversations and surveys closed carefully considering each response. We also took the opportunity to seek further input from General Synod through a fringe meeting in February.

We appreciate the candour and constructive nature of the feedback received from all groups, noting that we all share an objective to support clergy well.

We are already taking those steps within our means to enhance the services we offer in response to this feedback. For instance:

- Working to improve the support we already offer retirees to explore options with other providers (including other faith-based charities), and later life home ownership routes, as a route to broader choice.
- More explicitly considering the ongoing affordability to residents of homes purchased for the Church's retirement housing portfolio, with an increasing desire to add more energyefficient new build properties to our rental retirement housing choices.
- Improving our housing bulletin to allow applicants in search of a quality Church retirement home to get a better sense of a property.
- Increasing communication to encourage earlier planning with diocesan teams, TEIs, and others. This year we will undertake seven seminars in theological colleges and will be starting open-access webinars for clergy thinking about retirement housing options.

In parallel, we are using the feedback to help build various packages of future support to inform national Church funding discussions, whether that's ruling some ideas out (e.g. embedding planning questions in Ministry Development reviews) or considering new ones (e.g. loans to help with home ownership). Over the coming months, we will also be talking with dioceses about how these ideas might best be delivered.

While we cannot pre-empt the results of future funding discussions – nor would it be right for the Board to do so – we now have a much richer picture of what clergy need so that this can be properly considered in resource allocation decisions. Our hope is that we can bring forward many of the new choices and services that so caught the imagination of respondents, in addition to allowing the Church to continue to offer a quality retirement housing service to those who most need it. In doing so, we need to keep in mind the importance of putting forward a package of support that is generationally sustainable, so that clergy and the Church can make long-term plans for the future with confidence.

We look forward to sharing more of our thinking with you about the road ahead later this year.

CONTACT US

If you have any questions or comments about this report, please email: enablingchoice@ churchofengland.org. We will also be offering an opportunity to ask questions through upcoming webinars. To register, please go to www.churchofengland.org/enablingchoice

