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FIT FOR MISSION ANNUAL REVIEW

September 2026

The Fit for Mission Annual Review is in draft form, in preparation for approval at FfM/DIP Programme Board on 30 November.

The paper is for information for Diocesan Synod.
The agenda item for Synod is a panel discussion of people involved in established Larger Single Parishes.

Laura Jones
laura.jones@liverpool.anglican.org

Fit for Mission Annual Review

September 2026

Diocese of Liverpool

Paper Title:	**FfM Annual Review 2026**
To:	**Programme Board (FfM/DIP)** **Church Commissioners (V&S)**
From:	**Laura Jones (Senior Project Manager)**

Purpose of Report:

To provide the Programme Board with an evidence-led review of Fit for Mission progress from the programme's start in March 2022 to September 2026, including achievements to date, current risks and priorities for the remaining programme period. Where measures use a quarterly or rolling 12-month period, this is stated explicitly.

Recommendations:

The Programme Board is invited to:

1. **Note** progress made from March 2022 to September 2026, including the practical and cultural changes now visible in established and emerging Larger Single Parishes (LSPs)
2. **Endorse** the priorities for the remaining programme period, including completing the remaining pastoral and operational transitions, embedding collaborative leadership and support systems, and addressing the long-term sustainability of lower-income LSPs
3. **Support in principle** a time-limited extension to Fit for Mission, using existing programme resources, to complete implementation, embed change and transfer learning into ongoing diocesan structures.

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10. Key Risks

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1. Executive Summary

Fit for Mission exists to remove barriers that constrain mission and create stronger local churches through which more people can encounter Jesus, deepen their discipleship, develop as Christian leaders and work for justice. Structural change is a means to that end, not the purpose of the programme.

Four years into the programme, there is growing evidence that the structures and support established through Fit for Mission are contributing to the practical and cultural changes intended. Established LSPs have stronger leadership and governance, more collaborative ministry, clearer accountability and shared Support Services. Safeguarding compliance has improved significantly, financial systems are becoming more resilient, and buildings decisions are beginning to release resources for reinvestment in mission. Clergy consistently describe being better supported, less isolated and more able to lead collaboratively.

Mission planning is now a normal part of leadership in Local Leadership Teams, supported by Cultivate and (in the first cohort) Mission Planning and Review. Early indicators are encouraging: across the five established or emerging LSPs monitored in Q2 2026, average attendance at worshipping communities was 4.5% above the relevant cohort baselines for adults and 16% above baseline for under-16s. Growth remains uneven, but the overall direction of travel is positive.

The cohort approach has been an important strength. It has allowed learning from earlier LSPs to shape and improve work with later groups, while the first cohort now provide practical examples of LSPs in operation. An example of this is Cultivate, which has developed from a standard programme into a more flexible set of tools that respond to different contexts and mission priorities.

This progress has depended on a skilled and committed project team, bringing together expertise in mission, change, finance, governance, safeguarding, communications and buildings. Their specialist knowledge, resilience and commitment to the programme's missional priorities have been critical to what has been achieved.

The programme has also highlighted the scale of long-standing issues facing many churches in governance, finance, safeguarding, buildings and operations. Addressing theses has required more time and support than originally expected, but it is helping to establish safer, healthier and more sustainable churches.

In some cases LSPs have brought together churches with low financial capacity and significant buildings and operational challenges. The new structures are improving resilience, but their longer-term sustainability remains an important area of work. The next phase will focus on completing the remaining four LSPs, embedding the new leadership and support systems, and developing sustainable approaches for LSPs serving communities with lower financial capacity.

Fit for Mission is currently funded until mid-2028. Experience has shown that new ways of working continue to develop beyond the legal formation of an LSP. A time-limited extension of one year using existing programme resources is therefore proposed. This will enable us to embed the changes made through Fit for Mission into normal diocesan life.

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Proposed overall status: Amber-Green.

Amber-Green reflects substantial progress in establishing the core operating model and emerging evidence of benefit, alongside material dependencies that are not yet fully resolved. The principal amber elements are the sustainability of lower-income LSPs, implementation of buildings strategies, completion and embedding of the later cohorts, and transfer of key support functions into normal diocesan practice. These will remain the focus of the final-phase plan, finance forecast and risk register.

2. Good news stories

2.1. Case study one: Celebrate Recovery Halewood

"Christ Our Light has given me the space to put Celebrate Recovery into action as a Fresh Expression, as part of our shared mission" Rev James Hutchinson.

Figure 1: Celebrate Recovery team at Halewood



In June 2026, St Mary's Halewood launched Celebrate Recovery, a Christ-centred ministry helping people find freedom from life's hurts, habits and hang-ups through faith, community and mutual support.

The initiative emerged from mission planning facilitated through Cultivate and was identified as a priority by Christ Our Light (LSP), which has supported its development as a shared mission initiative. Celebrate Recovery has also received grant funding from DIP with Starter and Development funding totalling £3,500 that has meant they could create a welcoming space for people to walk in to.

Pioneered by curate Rev James Hutchinson, Celebrate Recovery is led by clergy and lay volunteers from churches across Christ Our Light, drawing together people and capacity from across the LSP rather than relying on one church to deliver it

alone. Celebrate Recovery is a 12-steps programme that Rev James has adapted to be a Fresh Expression with the inclusion of communion and baptism.

The response in the first 13 weeks has been remarkable. Around 40 people have become part of the community, with 20 individuals describing themselves as reaffirming or returning to faith in different way, and nine people plan to be baptised in November.

The early impact demonstrates how collaborative mission planning, local leadership and support across an LSP can create new opportunities for evangelism, discipleship and community transformation.

2.2. Case Study Two: Developing curates in LSPs

Figure 2 Kirsty Fazakerley and Kate Johnson, curates at Christ Our Hope



An encouraging theme is emerging from conversations with curates: they describe the breadth of experience and collaborative leadership environment of an LSP as a significant strength of their formation.

While the evidence is mostly anecdotal at this stage, feedback from recent curates suggests that training within an LSP can expose them to a wider range of ministry contexts, leadership styles and responsibilities than a traditional placement.

Speaking with Kirsty Fazakerley, curate in Christ Our Hope:

"There's lots of different types of churches, schools and different environments that we can go in and learn from. I've been to four different schools for assemblies… every school is different and you need different skills to do different assemblies."

Rather than learning ministry through a single context and relationship, curates are benefiting from exposure to different approaches to preaching, pastoral ministry, worship and leadership. As Kirsty says:

"Because we work with different clergy it's not just one person's experience or leadership skills."

Curates also reflected on how the variety of experiences available within an LSP helped prepare them for future incumbency. Kate Johnson, Curate, Christ Our Hope described being given leadership responsibility for a portfolio spanning the whole LSP:

"Within curacy I've been asked to take on a portfolio lead. That takes you into all of the churches in Christ Our Hope, working with laity and clergy in those different settings."

Early signs of impact

Between 2022 and 2024, 13 of Liverpool's 17 curates trained within an LSP. Although the sample size is small, an interesting pattern has emerged: none of those trained in an LSP have gone on to serve in a traditional single-parish post within Liverpool. Instead, they have either remained within LSP settings or moved to roles outside the diocese (for personal or geographical reasons).

This is not evidence that LSP training produces better clergy, nor that it is a decisive recruitment factor for ordinands. However, it does suggest that those trained in collaborative, team-based ministry environments are comfortable continuing to serve in them, whilst remaining well placed for appointment across the Church of England.

Looking ahead

Given the current clergy vacancy rate, the experience of recent curates' points to a potentially valuable aspect of our developing ministerial offer. The scale and team structure of an LSP can give curates experience of a wider range of church contexts, leadership relationships and responsibilities within a single placement.

2.3. Case study three: Sutton St Nicholas and St Michael and All Angels.

The Sutton story demonstrates how an LSP can take a wider view of buildings, mission and resources across several church communities. Supported by the FfM Right Buildings process, local leaders made decisions about where ministry should be focused, which properties were sustainable, and how resources released from buildings could be reinvested in mission across Church St Helens.

As a result, two unsustainable properties are being released for housing and specialist education, while the net receipts are being reinvested in retained buildings and mission across Church St Helens. The LSP has provided a way to make these decisions locally while taking a wider view of buildings, resources and future mission.

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Figure 3 Right Buildings case study



A locally led decision to focus mission and ministry

Through the buildings review, local leaders considered assessment of the building, the missional and financial health of the congregation, local consultation, and consideration of the future geographical pattern of ministry. They concluded that three church buildings were not needed to serve Sutton sustainably and that St Michael and All Angels should close for public worship.

Creating a viable development site

Following the decision to close St Michael and All Angels, the LDBF worked with local leaders to bring together the church, adjoining vicarage and glebe land as a single development opportunity. This created a coherent site that could attract investment and support wider community needs.

Conditional contracts were exchanged with Westshield, and the purchaser has submitted a residential planning application designed to respond to the St Helens Local Plan and the wider allocation of land in the area for new housing. The agreed consideration is approximately £2 million before transaction costs and related adjustments.

Subject to planning approval, currently anticipated for consideration by the local planning committee in October 2026, the sale will complete and unlock the site for residential development. The scheme also includes provision for a permanent memorial, developed with parish input, ensuring a visible connection with the former church and its place in the community.

One congregation, strengthened mission

The closure of the building did not mean the loss of the worshipping community. As Rev Lynne Powell shares: "On Sunday 26th April we held our final service at St Michael's and All Angels. We gave thanks to God for all the good that had happened in that sacred place. The existing congregation have now moved into St

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Nicholas church building adding a contemporary service on Sundays at 12.30pm which follows the traditional service at 10.30am. We feel excited about the future in Sutton and how the Holy Spirit is moving in people's hearts and in the life of the community."

While one building was released, the people, relationships and gifts of the congregation were retained within a stronger and more sustainable church community, helping to build capacity for mission and ministry in Sutton.

A new future for Sutton Parish Hall

The Right Buildings review also supported local leaders in considering the future of Sutton Parish Hall at St Nicholas. The conclusion was that the hall was no longer sustainable because of its running and maintenance costs.

Following marketing, the church accepted an offer of £1 million from Hopedale for the property to provide SEND education facilities for the locality. The proposal is progressing through the planning and legal processes.

This outcome closely reflects the church's aspirations for the building's future use. The property would continue to serve local people through education, inclusion and practical support for children, families and the wider community.

Reinvesting resources for growth across Church St Helens

Net proceeds from the two disposals will be reinvested within Church St Helens, ensuring that resources released from unsustainable properties continue to support mission and ministry locally.

At St Nicholas, part of the funding is expected to address churchyard issues and support targeted refurbishment work, helping the church accommodate the enlarged worshipping community and support wider parish activity.

It has also been agreed in principle that part of the available funding will support refurbishment and extension work at St Andrew's, Dentons Green. The congregation relocated there from the unsustainable church at Parr Mount. While the current building provides a better base for mission and ministry, investment is still needed to improve facilities, meet current needs and create capacity for future worship and community outreach, including the Spear Programme.

Spear provides free professional coaching for young people aged 16 to 24 who face barriers to employment, helping them build confidence and practical skills and supporting them into sustained work, education or training.

3. Aims and objectives

3.1. Aims of Fit for Mission

The key intention of Fit for Mission (FfM) is to transform the Diocese of Liverpool into a more sustainable, growth-oriented and mission-focused church by investing in discipleship, leadership development, evangelism and social justice, while also tackling the structural barriers that limit growth. The programme is intended to support every deanery through a locally led change process, creating stronger leadership teams, increasing the number of lay leaders, planting new worshipping communities, engaging younger and more diverse people, and expanding

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community justice initiatives. The ultimate aim is to enable more people to encounter and follow Jesus, deepen discipleship, and create a stronger church presence across local communities.

Alongside this missional focus, the programme will deliver significant organisational change to create a financially and operationally sustainable future. This involves creating larger mission-focused parish structures, making it possible to rationalise and repurpose church buildings, introducing shared Support Services, strengthening accountability and team-working, and embedding long-term financial discipline.

This review seeks to evidence how participating churches have changed how they lead, collaborate, make decisions and support local mission.

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3.2. Objectives of Fit for Mission

Initial objectives were set in 2022. Over the last 4 years the programme has evolved and DIP now builds new expectations, so where relevant an update to outcomes is provided. Overall the programme is delivering its intended outcomes, and sections 4 and 5 provide more detail on the progress of each area.

Intended outcome	Expected deliverables from FFM Bid	Update to expected deliverables
We have introduced more people to Jesus	Establish 100 new worshipping communities across the Diocese, including communities in schools and local neighbourhoods.	Expansion of Cultivate through DIP and evolvement of programme to undertake Church 360 and Mission 360 within FfM programme.
We have helped deepen people's discipleship	Embed a discipleship culture through the Rule of Life, nurture pathways, Activate and Directions programmes.	Expansion of Cultivate through DIP and evolvement of programme. Every church now completing Discipleship 360 in FfM programme.
We have developed more Christian leaders	Commission 200 Local Missional Leaders, expand Cultivate training, increase lay leadership capacity, and develop 25 Deacons.	Cultivate Lead/Grow, recognised vocations pathways, portfolio leadership and officer/subcommittee leadership.
We have created more justice in the world and our communities	Deliver 125 new justice initiatives, including projects that may develop into worshipping communities.	Together Liverpool and Cultivate now have integrated course with input to MPR.
Our worshipping communities are younger and more diverse	Increase engagement of younger generations and under-represented groups through new worshipping communities, schools work, justice initiatives and leadership development.	DIP funding to create deanery Youth hubs in established LSPs. DIP and flourish funding to create 60 new schools worshipping communities.
We have enough money to do the things we want to do	Create financially sustainable LSPs, increase stewardship and giving, diversify income, and achieve breakeven budgets.	Expectation of budgeting and additional support available for budgeting and income generation through DIP. MPR to structure this support.
We have got the buildings we need in the condition that we need them	Complete Right Buildings reviews, rationalise and repurpose assets, improve utilisation, reduce liabilities, and support Net Zero ambitions.	Right Buildings review, portfolio RAG, compliance and implementation pipeline
Our leaders have effective 1:1 support and accountability	Establish accountable leadership structures within each LSP, including regular coaching, supervision and Archdeacon engagement.	Weekly CLT, one-to-ones, PCC/subcommittee rhythms and coaching, development of new MDR integrating LSPs
We have an established culture of teamworking across the LSP	Create leadership teams in every LSP, establish portfolio-based ministry, coaching programmes and collaborative working across larger parish structures.	Create leadership teams in every LSP, establish portfolio-based ministry
We have lightened the administrative load for our clergy and lay volunteers	Introduce shared Support Services for administration, finance, HR, buildings and communications, allowing leaders to focus on mission and ministry.	Introduce shared Support Services for admin, finance, HR, buildings and comms. DIP expands to whole deanery.

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Diocese of Liverpool

4. Summary of outcomes to date (broad)

4.1. LSPs Overview

We have now completed Fit for Mission decision making for the whole diocese. In mid 2025 the cohort 2 PCCs held their confirmatory votes at which point the LSP in Ormskirk became unfeasible. Most Cohort 3 PCCs made their FfM decisions in September 2025, from which 2 more LSP groupings formed. Due to fragility of Liverpool North and Walton a period of listening was led by +Ruth early 2026, and in June a Cohort 4 was formed in North Liverpool.

Any future growth of LSPs is most likely to come from churches that wish to join an existing LSP. For example St Mary's in Hale who have started the process to join Christ Our Light in Liverpool South.

Table 1: Position at September 2026

Cohort	Deanery	LSP name	# churches /parishes on FfM	# parishes not in LSP	Notes
0	Wigan	Church Wigan	7 parishes (was 29)	0	Pre-FfM. Has Joint Council structure.
1	St Helens	Church St Helens	11 churches LSP	7	
1	West Derby	Christ Our Hope	9 churches LSP	3	
2	Warrington	Parish of Warrington	12 churches LSP	0	
2	Liverpool South	Christ Our Light	6 parishes (9 churches) LSP	6	St Mary's Hale expected to join Jan27.
2	Toxteth and Wavertree	Hope Parish	6 parishes LSP	6	Expected early 2027.
3	Winwick	Christ the Good Shepherd	11 parishes	3	
3	Sefton North	Christ the River of Life	3 parishes	8	Merge of deaneries being proposed.
3	Sefton South		5 parishes	4	
4	Lpool North & Walton	TBC	5 parishes	6	
The following 4 deaneries have no LSP with not enough parishes to form a feasible LSP					
	Widnes			6	3 voted yes. St Mary's to join Christ Our Light.
(2)	Ormskirk			13	7 yes initially, reduced to 4, no longer viable.
	North Meols			15	None voting to join
	Huyton			8	1 yes

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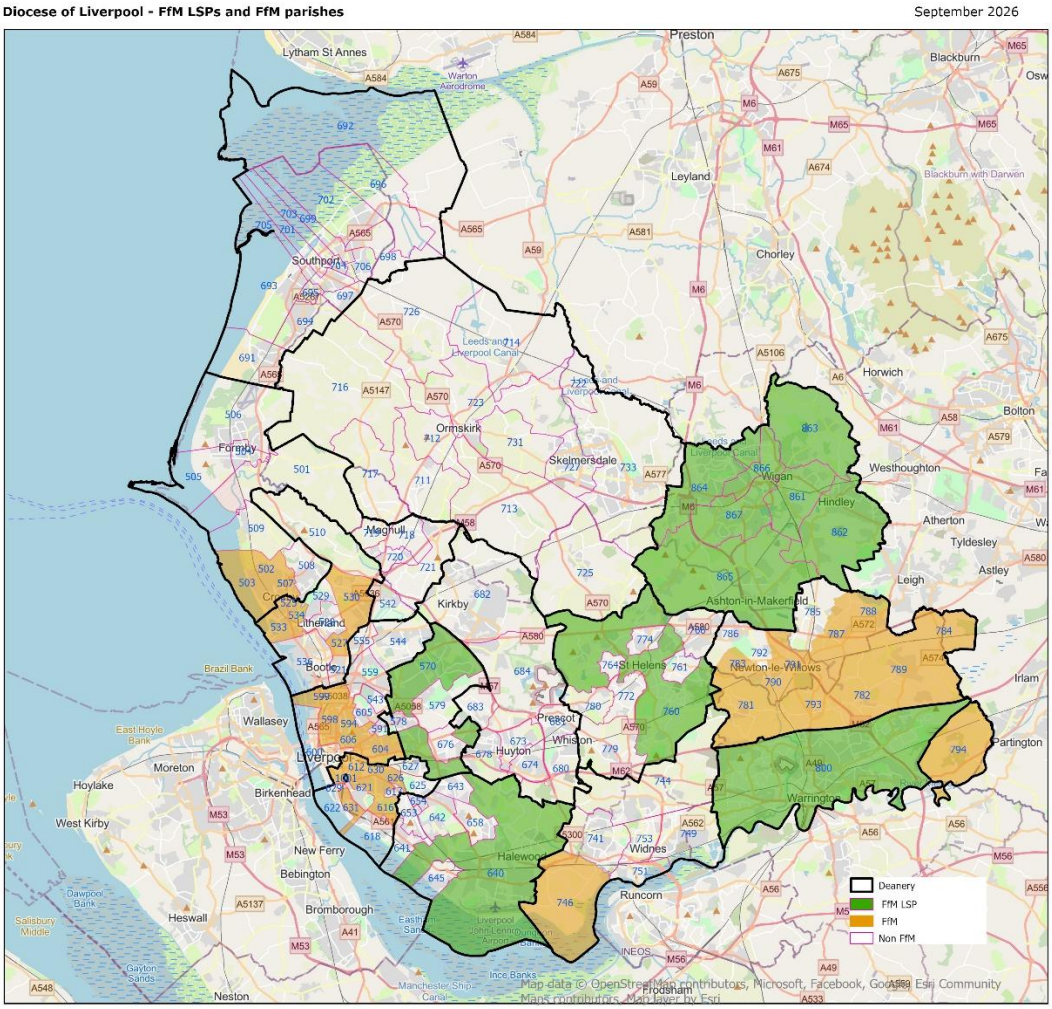
4.1.1. Diocese map and LSPs

LSPs are clusters of relatively geographically local churches and worshipping communities. The Fit for Mission programme is working in all but four of the deaneries. In future should churches wish to join a LSP those in the centre and south of the Diocese are most likely to find opportunity with a neighbouring LSP.

Figure 4 Map of diocese



4.1.2. Profile of churches that have joined LSPs

The proposed new Parish Share system groups churches into seven bands, from A1 to D, using measures of income and attendance. A1 churches have the greatest assessed capacity to contribute and D churches the least.

The bandings provide one way of understanding the financial profile of churches that have joined LSPs. They are not a measure of the overall health, strength or mission potential of a church.

Table 2: Proportion of LSPs and SPs in Parish Share Bandings

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	D
LSPs	0%	27%	18%	35%	54%	56%	69%
Single Parishes	100%	73%	82%	65%	46%	44%	31%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Churches across six of the seven Parish Share bands have joined LSPs, although participation is higher among churches in the lower contribution bands. Just over half of churches in C1 and C2 are in LSPs, rising to 69% in band D. Participation is lower among churches with greater assessed capacity to contribute: 27% of A2 churches are in LSPs and no A1 churches have joined to date.

This suggests that the LSP model has, so far, had greater take-up among churches with lower financial capacity, while also including churches across a broad range of financial circumstances.

4.1.3. Reasons for not joining LSPs

As part of the discernment process, PCCs were asked to record the reasons for their decision and, where they voted to proceed, any remaining concerns. The responses provide useful insight into both the reasons some churches chose not to join an LSP and aspects of the process and model that caused uncertainty.

Churches voting not to proceed generally expressed support for the missional aims of Fit for Mission, including numerical growth, deeper discipleship, leadership development, social justice and greater collaboration. Their concerns were more often about whether an LSP was the right means of achieving these aims in their context.

The most frequently cited concerns related to the potential loss of local identity and decision-making, uncertainty around governance and finances, and a lack of clarity about how the proposed model would work in practice. For some churches, this made it difficult to assess the likely impact of joining an LSP while its eventual shape was still developing.

Some churches also expressed a lack of confidence in the process. Others believed that effective mission and collaboration could continue through existing parish, deanery and ecumenical structures. Churches that considered themselves financially sustainable, missionally active or already collaborating effectively were among those questioning what additional benefit an LSP would bring. A smaller number raised concerns relating to theology, worship tradition, ecumenical partnerships, geography and local community context.

Learning from the discernment process:

The early engagement process has reinforced that significant change requires time to build trust and enable people to engage with the vision, as well as clarity about the proposed model. This informed the approach taken with the final cohort, which included a Bishop-led listening exercise and greater involvement from lay and clergy leaders already working within an LSP. This gave people more opportunity to be heard and to explore their questions and concerns, while hearing directly from those with experience of an LSP

4.1.4. Achieving the broad aims of Fit for Mission

The original ambition of Fit for Mission was to create a more sustainable, growth-oriented and mission-focused church by developing stronger leadership, deeper discipleship, greater collaboration, increased engagement in justice and

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more effective use of resources. The primary strategy for achieving this was the creation of LSPs.

Four years into the programme there is growing evidence that this strategy is working. Across the established LSPs, churches have developed strong leadership teams, embedded more collaborative ways of working, introduced shared Support Services, strengthened financial and governance processes, begun to address unsustainable buildings, expanded mission planning, created new worshipping communities and developed a stronger culture of accountability and shared responsibility. While progress varies between cohorts, the overall direction of travel is consistently positive.

It is important to recognise this approach has not been adopted everywhere in the Diocese. A number of deaneries and churches chose not to proceed towards a LSP, while in some areas it proved unviable. Local decisions are respected, and those churches continue to be supported by SJH teams, as well as receiving support from DIP funded initiatives such as Mission Planning and Review (MPR).

However, the experience of the LSPs that have formed has increased confidence in the overall strategy. The evidence, described in section 5, increasingly suggests that larger, collaborative parish structures provide a strong platform for mission, discipleship, leadership development, justice and long-term sustainability than many churches could otherwise achieve.

The remaining phase must ensure these gains are embedded consistently, translated into sustained missional and financial outcomes, and maintained after programme support reduces.

5. Summary of outcomes to date (objectives)

5.1. Cultivate (mission, discipleship)

Over the last three years Cultivate has evolved from a largely standard programme into a flexible toolkit supporting churches to reflect on mission, discipleship and church growth within their local context. Two distinct pathways have emerged: Refresh, which helps existing worshipping communities review and develop their mission and discipleship, and Fresh, which supports the development of new worshipping communities and lay-led missional initiatives.

A significant achievement of the programme has been the embedding of mission planning as a normal leadership discipline. During the last year, Cultivate delivered 65 Mission 360 workshops, resulting in 47 churches developing mission plans, while 1,567 people participated in discipleship reviews across 50 churches.

The early success and learning from Cultivate in Cohort 1 helped secure DIP investment to roll it out across the Diocese. Mission and discipleship planning is now integrated into Mission Planning and Review (MPR), providing a common framework for churches, LSP leadership teams and deaneries to identify priorities, review progress and focus resources.

This growing culture of mission planning is beginning to be accompanied by encouraging attendance trends. Average adult attendance across Cohorts 1 and

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2 increased by approximately 4.5% against baseline, while under-16 attendance increased by 16%. Growth remains uneven between locations, reflecting different starting points, local contexts and stages of development. However, in a period characterised by significant organisational change, some church mergers and building closures, and wider challenges affecting church attendance, the overall direction of travel is positive.

At the same time, the programme recognises that progress in planting new worshipping communities has been slower than originally hoped during the last 12 months. In response, Cultivate is placing renewed emphasis on planting, lay leadership development, mentoring and a renewed focus on establishment of Local Cultivate Teams.

Looking ahead, every participating church and LSP will have an established mission planning process supported through the four-year DIP investment period. Together with Youth Hubs, Resource Hubs and ongoing Cultivate support, this provides a stronger platform than previously existed for the growth of existing worshipping communities, the development of new worshipping communities, the emergence of lay leaders and increased engagement with children and young people.

Table 3: Cultivate activities from start of "Acting as if"

	St Helens	West Derby	Warrington	Liverpool South	Toxteth & Wavertree
Number completed Cultivate course	164	70	93	50	46
Number attended Grow	32	17	30	17	15
360's (or similar) reviews completed	75	49	37	23	17
New worshipping communities (current number)	7	8	10	5	1

Cohort 1
Cultivate is now part of the MPR process for Cohort 1. The established LSP culture of collaboration, structures and processes in Cohort 1 are bearing fruit, with full engagement and Funding the Future bids approved in September 2026.

Cohort 2
Each "acting as if" LSP has been assigned a dedicated Cultivate enabler who supports the churches in both the *Refresh* and *Fresh* pathways. They work closely with the Clergy Leadership Team (CLT) and support the development of a LSP-wide mission plan – areas where some or all of the churches collaborate on the four missional priorities. Following the Cultivate course attendees are invited to join Grow. Over the programme period, Cultivate has developed from a largely standard pathway into a more responsive toolkit, allowing churches and LSP leadership teams to identify the actions most relevant to their context. Within FfM, dedicated Cultivate Enablers have worked with Clergy Leadership Teams, Local Leadership Teams and local Cultivate groups to connect church-

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level reflection with shared LSP mission planning. This represents an important cultural shift: mission planning is becoming a continuing leadership discipline rather than an occasional exercise.

5.2 Working for Justice – learning communities

Working for Justice is delivered in partnership with Together Liverpool, supporting churches to identify local needs and turn their ideas into practical action. Across the project, churches have been supported to launch 75 justice initiatives, including food provision, community spaces, family support, work with older people, refugee welcome and wellbeing activities. Learning Communities have been completed in West Derby, Huyton, Sefton South and Sefton North, while direct support has helped individual churches develop projects, build partnerships and secure funding where deanery-wide delivery has progressed more slowly.

The work has also strengthened churches' ability to understand and evidence their impact. More than 200 digital responses have been gathered through the deanery social-action survey, proportionate impact-measurement approaches have been built into Learning Communities, and seven best-practice guides have been produced to help churches learn from successful projects.

An important recent achievement has been the Toxteth & Wavertree pilot, where Together Liverpool and Cultivate sessions have been delivered collaboratively through the Pastoral Leadership Team. This has brought justice activity and new worshipping community planting together, rather than allowing them to develop as separate or competing programmes. The experience has been reviewed and has provided valuable learning that is already shaping future delivery.

5.2 Working for Justice – eco church development

Faiths4Change have been working with LSPs to help churches gain EcoChurch awards and progress from Bronze to Silver and Gold. We have learnt that this has worked best in the more established LSPs, where there is more capacity for collaboration, and Support Services can help with events, communications and coordination.

Both Christ Our Hope and Church St Helens have held successful LSP-wide eco events over the past year. Christ Our Hope now has five Eco Church awards, including two Gold and one Silver, while Church St Helens has nine awards, including three Silver.

5.3 Lay leadership

Cultivate has created a broader route through which lay people can explore mission, contribute to local and LSP-wide planning, and discern potential leadership of new worshipping communities. Participation in Cultivate and Grow demonstrates the scale of engagement and the existence of a leadership pipeline, but should not be seen as the number of leaders developed.

LSP structures provide an enabling environment: Local Leadership Teams and Local Cultivate Teams allow lay people to shape priorities alongside clergy, while MPR review processes create practical opportunities to exercise leadership. The

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next phase needs to strengthen progression from participation and initial discernment into supported leadership, mentoring and sustained responsibility.

Table 4: Ministry development

LSP	Directions	LMLs	Ordination pathway
West Derby / Christ Our Hope	**4**	**0**	**2**
St Helens / Church St Helens	**1**	**0**	**1**
Warrington / Parish of Warrington	**3**	**5**	**0**
Liverpool South / Christ Our Light	**2**	**0**	**3**
Toxteth & Wavertree / Hope Parish Liverpool	**1**	**1**	**1**
Total from LSP rows	**11**	**6**	**7**

Note that these figures capture recognised or licensed ministries only. They do not include the wider group of lay people exercising leadership through Local Leadership Teams, Cultivate Teams, mission initiatives, PCC subcommittees and LSP portfolios.

5.4 Youth and children

Table 5: Average under-16 attendance at worshipping communities. Cohort 1 baseline is October 2022; Cohort 2 baseline is October 2024.

	Baseline under-16 attendance	Q2 2026	Change	Percentage change
Cohort 1	267	259	-8	-3%
Cohort 2	543	679	136	25%
Total	**810**	**938**	**128**	**16%**

Under-16 attendance across church worshipping communities and worship/justice communities increased by around 16% against baseline across Cohorts 1 and 2. However, the pattern of growth varies considerably between LSPs and reflects different local priorities and starting points.

Warrington has seen the largest numerical increase, driven particularly by growth at St Ann's and St Philip's Stay and Praise. Church St Helens has also recorded growth above baseline, while Hope Parish Liverpool has grown from a comparatively small start point.

In Liverpool South, children's attendance was already relatively high at baseline, supported in part by strong links with local Church schools. As a result, numerical growth in attendance has not been the primary objective with greater emphasis placed on discipleship, and leadership development.

Toxteth and Wavertree presents a different picture. Starting from a much smaller base of children and young people, growth has been an explicit priority, particularly through work centred on St Michael in the City. While overall numbers remain modest compared with some other LSPs, percentage growth is very encouraging with progress in locations where engagement with children and families was previously limited.

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As each LSP forms they are working with the Under 18's team to launch a (DIP funded) Youth Hub and develop specific local strategies for children and young people across the deanery. Church St Helens has hosted a Youth Hub since September 2025, while Liverpool South, West Derby and Warrington are launching hubs in September 2026.

5.5 Finances

FfM has put in place a strong financial structure: consistent accounting, professional finance support, annual budgeting, clearer oversight and a much more manageable role for local volunteers.

LSP	MFA usage	Finance Officer	Annual budgeting	Finance Coordinator model	PGS giving trend
Christ Our Hope	Established	Established	Established	Established	→ Stable
Church St Helens	Established*	Established	Established	Established	↑ Increased
Parish of Warrington	Established	Established	Established	Embedding	→ Stable
Christ Our Light	Established	Established	Embedding	Embedding	↑ Increased
Hope Parish Liverpool	5 of 6 churches	In recruitment	Not yet embedded	Developing	↓ Decreased
Christ the Good Shepherd	In progress	N/A	In progress	N/A	N/A
Christ the River of Life	In progress	N/A	In progress	N/A	N/A
Liverpool North & Walton	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Financial stabilisation is becoming increasingly visible through the systems, processes and support now in place across the LSPs. This is particularly significant given that many of the churches entering LSPs were among those facing the greatest financial pressures, often alongside substantial building and maintenance costs. An early concern was that PGS giving could drop. PGS data provides no evidence of a collapse in planned giving following the structural changes.

Financial administration has shifted with local Finance Coordinators retaining local oversight and book keeping, while routine accounting, reporting and compliance are managed centrally. This reduces the burden on volunteers while strengthening financial assurance.

This work is creating a stronger foundation for future growth rather than simply improving financial administration. LSPs are now better placed to make effective use of the additional investment and support available through DIP, including the MPR process, buildings investment and work to develop new and more diverse sources of income. Better financial information, regular budgeting and stronger professional support should enable leaders to identify pressures earlier,

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make more confident investment decisions and direct resources towards their mission priorities.

Later cohorts are at an earlier stage, but are beginning to put the same foundations in place.

5.6 Buildings

The buildings workstream has deliberately avoided numerical targets for closures, disposals, or refurbishments. It's purpose is to ensure that each LSP have churches (and halls) that support, rather than hinder, the four mission priorities: introducing people to Jesus, deepening discipleship, developing Christian leaders, and working for justice. Progress is therefore assessed by the sustainability of the buildings, the contribution they make to mission and community life, and the ability of each LSP to focus its people and financial resources on its agreed strategy.

Key outcomes to date include:

- Right Buildings reviews have provided an evidence base to support buildings decisions
- High-risk buildings are being addressed through closure, disposal, lease, partnership, or alternative use rather than being retained as an unmanaged burden.
- Investment activity is focused on retained buildings that can support worship, mission growth, community outreach, and new forms of income.
- The first Cohort 1 disposals and leases are progressing towards completion, creating a route for net receipts to be reinvested within LSPs.
- Compliance work is creating a clearer baseline and targeted improvement programme, although data maturity still varies between LSPs.
- Partnership working with councils, MPs, developers, education providers, funders, and community organisations is producing better community outcomes, including housing, SEND provision, regeneration, and youth-employment support.
- Closure of a building need not mean loss of worship: congregations are integrating successfully with neighbouring churches

The programme is now moving from review into implementation. Earlier LSPs have a clearer basis for decisions about retaining, investing in, repurposing or releasing buildings, while later cohorts continue to complete reviews and compliance assessments. Progress can be seen in active disposal and lease activity, targeted investment and new partnerships. While each LSP is at a different stage, the overall direction is clear: a smaller portfolio of more sustainable, mission-enabling buildings, supported by reinvestment of receipts and external funding.

The table below provides a current overview by LSP. The Red, Amber and Green ratings from the Right Buildings reviews indicate the assessed risk of investing in each building, rather than a target for closure: Green buildings are lower-risk platforms for mission; Amber buildings require intervention, clearer plans or further testing; and Red buildings are high-risk and may need release, significant change or

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an alternative use. The remaining measures show progress in resolving buildings no longer required, putting property into productive use, developing investment projects, and strengthening statutory compliance.

LSP	Total no. churches	R	A	G	Exploring closure*	Sale / lease in progress	Investment	Compliance	Current position / next step
Church St Helens	12	2	7	3	2	2	8	98%	Sutton disposals progressing; receipts planned for reinvestment in retained churches and mission.
Christ Our Hope	10	2	4	4	2	2	3	95%	Right Buildings 2.0 proposed to retest priorities and shape a coordinated reinvestment plan.
Parish of Warrington	12	0	3	9	0	1	—	80%	Priority is improving compliance
Christ Our Light	9	1	5	3	1	—	2	52%	Right Buildings complete; focus on two investment schemes and will start working on planning for future investment strengthening current building. Plus addressing the compliance baseline.
Hope Parish Liverpool	9	2	5	2	2	1	—	51%	Two high-risk buildings identified: one leased and one disposal progressing. Work needs to be focused on plans for the 5 amber rated buildings some of which may become subsequent disposals. Compliance baseline emerging.
Christ the Good Shepherd	11	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Right Buildings review not yet complete although the locally formed team is established; figures and priorities remain to be confirmed.
Christ the River of Life	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Right Buildings review not yet complete although the locally formed team is established; no verified compliance position yet.
Church Wigan	31	4	15	12	4	7	5	—	Largest estate and disposal pipeline; five investment projects and a café income pilot are progressing. More work to be done on a Right Buildings 2.0 and addressing the amber rated buildings.

* Churches going through the closure process with Church Commissioners

The Church Commissioners' closure and disposal process is lengthy, and completed sales are only now beginning to emerge from Cohort 1. We are therefore continuing to work with Cohort 1 while starting early planning with Cohort 2, helping each LSP translate its vision for ministry and mission into a prioritised plan for its churches and other buildings.

Over the past 12 months, the buildings team has strengthened its capacity by bringing together architects, surveyors, project managers and programme specialists. This has increased support for local churches as they consider how their buildings can best serve their communities, respond to financial challenges, create new income opportunities and contribute to net-zero ambitions. Partnerships with local authorities, regional organisations and civic leaders are also helping connect church projects with wider regeneration priorities and funding opportunities. In St Helens, for example, support has helped strengthen the Minster's role as a civic anchor through involvement in the Growth Board and Town Hall Business Forum, alongside a bid to the Places of Worship Renewal Fund submitted in August 2026.

5.7 Clergy leadership, accountability and team culture

One of the original aims of Fit for Mission was to ensure that clergy leaders received effective support and accountability, while creating a culture of genuine team working across the LSPs. Evidence from across the established LSPs suggests that this has been one of the programme's most significant achievements.

The Clergy Leadership Team (CLT) sits at the heart of leadership within each LSP. Clergy meet regularly, usually weekly, to pray together, check in on progress, support one another, discuss challenges and make decisions. CLTs are built around shared responsibility for mission, ministry and leadership. Clergy are accountable not only for their local church but also for the flourishing of the wider parish. This creates a level of mutual commitment, shared ownership and interdependence that is fundamentally different from the experience of most clergy working within traditional parish structures. Clergy in LSPs describe leadership as something undertaken together rather than carried alone.

The development of this culture been supported by team coaching, individual coaching, external facilitation, residentials and dedicated time together. In the last two years more than twenty clergy and key leaders have received individual coaching focused on leading effectively within LSPs and balancing the challenges of local ministry, wider leadership responsibilities and organisational change. Common themes included transition, conflict, difficult conversations, competing demands and resilience.

The role of the Team Rector has been critical in shaping this culture. Experience from across the LSPs suggests that healthy team cultures require intentional leadership. Team Rectors are not simply responsible for governance or administration; they play a key role in creating trust, addressing conflict, supporting individual clergy, encouraging collaboration and holding the team together around a shared vision. Team coaching, facilitation and peer support have helped Team Rectors develop these skills and create environments where clergy are able to flourish whilst remaining accountable to one another and to the wider parish.

The impact of this shift is perhaps best illustrated through clergy testimony. Reflecting on life within a Clergy Leadership Team, Rev Aaron Dunne said: "We meet together every week and although it's a commitment there's so much you get out of that, camaraderie, sharing ideas, support, and just really realising you're not on your own." Similarly, Rev Claire Aldridge described the wider support of the CLT as essential in her first incumbency, while Rev Becca Cottrell reflected that collaborative ministry means "we are able to do our jobs as parish priests better as a result."

Whilst clergy wellbeing was not an explicit programme objective, it has emerged as a significant positive outcome. Clergy repeatedly describe reduced isolation, greater confidence in leadership, stronger peer relationships and a renewed sense of support in ministry. The evidence remains largely qualitative, but it

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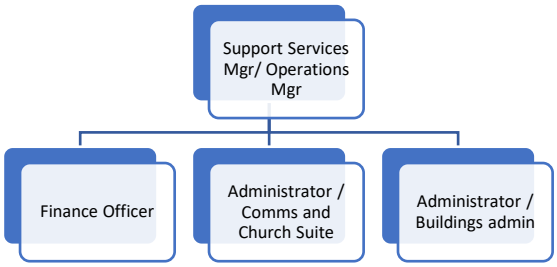
consistently points to the development of healthier leadership cultures that are better equipped to sustain ministry, navigate change and lead mission collaboratively.

5.8 Support Services Teams

There is now an established model for Support Services that is tweaked and customised according to the size and particular priorities for the churches. It is usually a Manager, Finance Officer and 1 or 2 administrators who may be general or focused in an area.

Typical Support Services Team:



Core services provided by Support Services team:

Cohort 1 are established, Cohort 2 are setting up and adding in new services using a staggered approach. Cohort 3 and 4 are not yet at the stage where they are establishing Support Services.

	Church St Helens	Christ Our Hope	Parish of Warrington	Christ Our Light	Hope Parish Liverpool
Safer recruiting	Active	Active	Part active	In progress	In progress
HR	Active	Active	Part Active/Needs Attention	Not started	Not started
Buildings care	Active	Active	Active	Needs Attention	Not started
Funerals Weddings Baptisms	Active	Active	Not Started	Part Active	Not started
Halls bookings	Active	Active	Not Started	Not Started	Not started
Comms	Active	Active & revisiting	In Progress	In Progress	In Progress
Fundraising	Active	Active	Not Started	Not Started	Not started
Finance	Active	Active	Part Active	Part Active	Not started
Income generation	In Progress	In progress	Not Started	Not Started	Not Started
Policies and Governance	Active	Active	In progress	In progress	In progress

The LSPs are making positive progress, but they are at different stages of maturity. Church St Helens and Christ Our Hope are focused on consolidation and

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improvement. Warrington continues to work on integrating its Support Services team and establishing the function as a whole across the LSP. Liverpool South has established a basic support function but is still in its infancy as a LSP. Hope Parish Liverpool completing recruitment and establishing governance practices before coming a LSP.

5.9 Safeguarding

FFM Safeguarding overall: Current levels for Cohort 1 & 2				
	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Number of Churches	0	4	12	28
% of Churches	0%	9%	27%	64%

Over the last year of quarterly monitoring, safeguarding compliance across LSPs improved significantly. The proportion of churches achieving full safeguarding compliance (Level 3) increased from 8% in October 2025 to 64% by July 2026, with no churches remaining at the lowest compliance level by the end of the reporting period.

Kate Kennedy leads the Fit for Mission support to the Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs) in the change period, during which time they meet regularly as a group to prepare for becoming a sub-committee for the PCC in the LSP.

- **Support for PSOs** through group meetings paired with one-to-one time, which has been especially effective in building the confidence of less experienced officers to raise concerns and ask questions.
- **Practical tools that make compliance manageable.** Safer recruitment guidance, a tracking spreadsheet, using the parish safeguarding dashboards that give PSOs and clergy clear sight of what's outstanding.
- **Addressing data/records storage.** Safeguarding records that had been kept at PSOs' home addresses are now in secure, locked storage within churches, reducing risk and easing the burden on volunteers.
- **Establishing the Lead PSO role.** Coordinating each LSPs PSOs. Predictions look like approximately six hours a month based on early experience in St Helens and West Derby.
- **Reducing PSO's admin.** Support Services and ChurchSuite are taking on administrative tasks, including safer recruitment, that previously fell to PSOs. PSOs have said this is one of the biggest advantages of working within a LSP, freeing them to focus on safeguarding itself.

These changes are creating a culture shift from safeguarding being an isolated administrative burden to a visible, supported and shared responsibility.

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5.10 Church communications

FfM Comms: Cohorts 1 and 2		
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
Number on ChurchSuite	1747	1775
CS newsletters last quarter	61	63
ChurchSuite safer recruited records	615	412

Good communication is at the heart of the LSP, not only for its effective functioning, but also its missional ability. The Fit for Mission programme sets the new LSP up with new communication tools including ChurchSuite, Social Media, and Canva which work alongside the existing church communication methods such as ACNY, pew sheets, and word of mouth.

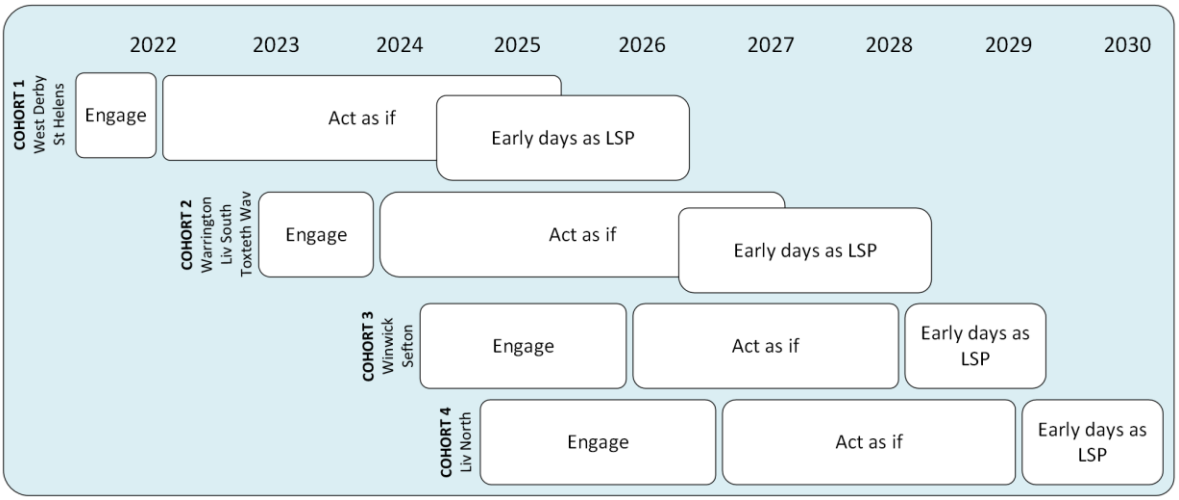
Good communication with church members and community is a key factor where we see missional growth. Clare Coombes the FfM Church Comms Advisor is focused on working with churches and Support Services to establish good communication in every church.

- Recruiting a comms champion for every church.
- Creating a sustainable comms loop
- Comms training for clergy and volunteers
- Training in ChurchSuite and social media. Short video created for church comms champions to use to explain in church how ChurchSuite helps mission and ministry. Support Services for ongoing support

6 Completed and planned activity

The engage phase, of supporting churches to decide on whether they want to go forward with other churches with the intention of becoming a LSP is now complete. Every PCC in Liverpool Diocese has decided, with the final ones In Liverpool North completing in June 2026.

Figure 2 Overview of FfM timings by cohort



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6.3 What has gone to plan?

One of the most encouraging aspects of Fit for Mission has been the continued commitment across the Diocese to its four mission priorities. While there have naturally been differences of opinion about the means of achieving them, senior diocesan leadership, bishops, deaneries and local leaders have consistently supported the need to create structures capable of sustaining mission, discipleship, leadership development and justice over the long term.

A major milestone has been the completion of the discernment and decision-making phase. Every parish in the Diocese has now made its Fit for Mission decision. While not every proposed LSP proceeded, we have successfully completed a complex process of engagement and discernment across every deanery. This provides clarity about the current landscape and allows increasing focus on embedding and strengthening the structures that have been created.

The programme's delivery model has also worked largely as intended. A highly skilled team has been assembled with expertise in change management, finance, governance, safeguarding, communications, buildings and mission. The commitment to locally led change has been a defining feature of the programme, helping churches develop ownership of both their decisions and their future. Navigation Teams, bringing together clergy and lay leaders, have proved particularly effective in guiding decision-making, building relationships and modelling the collaborative culture that later develops within LSPs.

The cohort approach has demonstrated considerable value. Experience and learning from earlier cohorts has informed later phases of the programme, allowing approaches to be refined and improved. The programme today is stronger because it has learnt and adapted as experience has accumulated. Cultivate provides a good example of this evolution, developing from a largely standardised process into a more flexible set of tools capable of supporting churches across a wide range of contexts, traditions and mission priorities.

There is now growing evidence that the structures established through Fit for Mission are delivering the benefits anticipated at the outset. Clergy Leadership Teams are becoming established centres of leadership, accountability and support, while Support Services are increasingly embedded in the earlier cohorts. Support Services are now providing support across areas including finance, safeguarding, governance, communications, buildings and administration. This has reduced reliance on individual clergy and volunteers to manage increasingly complex operational responsibilities, creating greater consistency and resilience across the LSPs, and releasing time for mission, discipleship and pastoral ministry.

Alongside this, peer networks are emerging between Team Rectors, Support Services Managers, Finance Officers and other key roles. These relationships are creating opportunities for shared learning, mutual support and greater consistency, helping ensure that knowledge and good practice continue beyond the life of the project.

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Fit for Mission has also created a strong platform for wider diocesan initiatives. The leadership structures, governance foundations and collaborative culture established through the programme have enabled churches to engage positively with opportunities created through the Diocesan Investment Programme, including MPR, youth hubs, and resource hubs.

Finally, there are early signs that confidence in the LSP model is extending beyond the formal programme. Churches are beginning to explore joining LSPs after the Fit for Mission process, suggesting that future growth of LSPs may come through voluntary expansion and local demand rather than programme-led formation.

6.4 What areas have been challenging or not completed as planned?

The most significant challenge over the last three years has been supporting churches through the decision-making process around becoming LSPs. While many churches engaged positively, some deaneries and PCCs experienced high levels of anxiety and uncertainty about the proposals. This made engagement activity more demanding than anticipated and placed considerable pressure on local leaders and members of the project team. Not all proposed LSPs proceeded, and maintaining positive relationships between churches taking different approaches was particularly challenging in the earlier cohorts.

Closely linked to this is the challenge of communication. People wanted to understand in practical terms what a LSP would look like, how it would operate and what benefits it would bring. While the cohort approach was intended to allow later deaneries to learn from earlier ones, many of the benefits and outcomes from Cohort 1 have only become fully visible recently.

The additional confirmatory vote introduced for Cohort 2 proved less successful than anticipated. While intended to provide reassurance and allow churches to begin "acting as if", it prolonged uncertainty increased anxiety and hampered progress.

Pastoral Schemes, Support Services, governance arrangements and financial systems have all required more time and support than originally anticipated. Experience from Cohorts 1 and 2 suggests that newly formed LSPs typically require around a further year of operational support before new ways of working become fully established.

Governance and compliance have required a greater level of investment than expected. Significant additional work has been needed to establish consistent standards and practices, particularly for churchwardens, treasurers and safeguarding officers. Similarly, substantial effort has been required to develop financial systems capable of operating effectively across multiple churches within a single parish.

Finally, LSPs have required wider organisational change within the Diocese. Colleagues across St James's House have had to adapt to new governance and operating arrangements and understand their implications for day-to-day work with churches. While significant progress has been made, achieving consistent

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understanding and practice has required ongoing communication, coordination and training.

It is important to distinguish between delay and underperformance. Pastoral schemes, disposals and the establishment of some later-cohort support systems have taken longer because of legal processes, sequencing, recruitment and local capacity, but remain deliverable. Other elements have required redesign: the Cohort 2 confirmatory vote was less successful than intended, and Cultivate has been adapted where a standardised approach did not translate consistently into new leaders or worshipping communities.

7 What are the future plans?

The Fit for Mission programme is over half way through. While the period of consultation, discernment and decision-making is largely complete, the work of embedding LSPs as the long-term operating model of the Diocese remains substantial.

Fit for Mission is currently funded until mid-2028. Experience shows that embedding a LSP goes about a year beyond its formation and so consideration is being given to requesting an extension beyond the current end date using existing programme resources, with no request for additional funding. The purpose would be to ensure that the changes already made are fully embedded and sustainable, rather than to introduce further structural change.

The focus of the remaining phase is on completing the formation of the final four LSPs, as well as ensuring that existing and emerging LSPs are able to flourish long after programme support has been withdrawn.

7.1 Ensuring future pathways for churches wishing to join an LSP

The formal Fit for Mission engagement process has now concluded across the Diocese. However, it is likely that future growth in LSPs will occur through churches requesting to join existing structures rather than through programme-led formation.

The next phase will focus on ensuring that clear processes, governance arrangements and diocesan support are in place so that churches wishing to join an existing LSP in future are able to do so in a consistent and well-supported way. While dedicated project support remains available during the remaining programme period, the aim is to establish arrangements that can continue to operate successfully beyond the life of the project.

7.2 Embedding leadership, collaboration and organisational systems

Considerable effort has been invested in creating new structures, including Clergy Leadership Teams, local leadership teams, Support Services, finance systems, safeguarding arrangements and mission planning processes.

The next challenge is ensuring that these become normal ways of working rather than activities sustained only through direct programme support. Particular attention will be given to:

- Developing peer-to-peer support networks

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- Ensuring that new clergy, churchwardens, safeguarding officers, treasurers and lay leaders are able to enter established systems and become effective quickly;
- Embedding Support Services as reliable providers of governance, financial administration, safeguarding, communications and operational support;
- Ensuring that successful approaches developed through the programme become part of normal diocesan practice and support structures.

The test of success in this phase will be whether collaborative leadership, accountability and shared working continue to strengthen without reliance on project intervention.

7.3 Developing sustainability for lower-income LSPs

LSPs contain a disproportionately high number of churches within the lower parish-share bands and have often brought together churches facing significant challenges around finance, buildings and capacity. LSPs have provided structures and support that are helping these churches become more resilient. However, this does not remove the underlying challenges associated with lower levels of income, deprivation or limited access to local resources.

Over the next two years the Diocese will work with LSP leaders to explore what long-term sustainability looks like in these contexts. This work will include consideration of funding models, income generation, use of assets, deployment of Support Services and the wider support available through diocesan structures.

There are not yet definitive solutions, but there is recognition that the long-term sustainability of lower-income LSPs will be a strategic priority for the Diocese beyond the life of the programme.

7.4 Embedding Fit for Mission learning across the Diocese

Embedding the changes will be supported in part by DIP investment, giving established LSPs a further four years of structured support through Deanery Youth Hubs, Resource Hubs and Mission Planning and Review (MPR). MPR brings together mission and discipleship planning, budgeting and Generous Discipleship within a regular cycle of review and support. Together, these provide a framework for LSPs to build on the leadership, governance and collaborative structures established through FfM.

Alongside this, key FfM ways of working need to become embedded and self-sustaining. These include collaborative leadership and accountability, Support Services, finance and safeguarding systems, church-officer support, communications and buildings management. The remaining FfM period will focus on embedding these practices, building peer networks, transferring knowledge and establishing clear long-term ownership so they continue beyond the programme.

7.5 Supporting programme staff through transition

The success of Fit for Mission has depended upon a highly skilled and committed team, most of whom have worked on fixed-term appointments while supporting some of the most significant organisational change undertaken by the Diocese in

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recent decades. Their expertise, resilience and willingness to invest personally in the programme have been critical to the progress achieved.

As the programme moves towards completion, attention will also be given to supporting staff through the transition that follows project closure. This includes ensuring that valuable expertise is transferred into diocesan structures where appropriate, recognising the significant contribution made by individual team members, and supporting colleagues as they move into future employment opportunities.

The programme is therefore moving from a phase of formation to a phase of consolidation. The major strategic decisions have largely been made, but the work of embedding sustainable leadership, governance, financial systems and collaborative ministry across the Diocese will continue beyond the point at which the final LSPs are established. The remaining period of programme activity is focused on ensuring that these changes become permanent, self-sustaining and capable of supporting the Diocese's mission for the long term.

8 Delivery issues

8.1 Capacity, recruitment and organisational resilience

Delivering a programme of this scale has required building and retaining a highly skilled team with expertise across governance, finance, safeguarding, communications, buildings, mission and organisational change. Alongside recruiting specialist staff, significant effort has been required to ensure that project staff work closely alongside Diocesan colleagues. This has helped avoid duplication, supported knowledge transfer and ensured that learning from the programme can be embedded more widely across the Diocese.

The nature of the work also places considerable demands on staff. Team members are frequently supporting churches through uncertainty, conflict and significant change. Ongoing investment in team support, coaching, supervision and shared learning has therefore been important in maintaining the wellbeing and effectiveness of the programme team itself.

8.2 Identifying and resolving long-standing issues

One of the most significant demands on programme resources has been uncovering and addressing issues that existed before churches entered the change process. As governance, finance, safeguarding, buildings and operational arrangements have been reviewed in greater detail, areas requiring improvement have often become visible for the first time.

A relatively small issue in a single church can require a disproportionate level of support and specialist intervention. While this has increased the workload associated with delivery, it has also been one of the programme's most important contributions. Stronger governance, improved financial controls, safeguarding compliance and clearer operational processes are reducing risk and creating more sustainable foundations for the future.

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Progress on buildings strategy has also been slower than originally anticipated. Closure and disposal of church buildings involves statutory pastoral processes, consultation, legal and planning requirements, and Church Commissioners' approvals, which are often sequential and can take several years. In addition, investment projects frequently depend on disposal receipts, creating unavoidable dependencies between schemes. As a result, visible outcomes can lag significantly behind the work required to achieve them.

8.3 Communicating and implementing organisational change

Supporting churches through the transition to LSPs has frequently required more communication, engagement and practical support than originally anticipated. Many churches wanted greater clarity about how LSPs would operate in practice and what the implications would be for local leadership, governance, finance and ministry.

The programme has responded through listening exercises, workshops, guidance documents, case studies and increased communication with clergy, lay leaders and diocesan colleagues. However, experience suggests that organisational change of this scale requires sustained communication long after initial decisions have been made.

8.4 Governance and implementation complexity

Establishing new governance structures, Support Services, financial systems and pastoral schemes has consistently taken longer than originally anticipated. A number of areas have required the development of new policies, procedures and governance arrangements, often in areas where there were few existing diocesan precedents.

8.5 Leadership transition and organisational alignment

The programme has operated during a period of significant leadership transition within the Diocese. During the lifetime of Fit for Mission there has been substantial change in senior leadership, including the arrival of new bishops and diocesan secretary. New leadership has brought fresh perspectives and opportunities, and required time to build shared understanding, ownership and confidence in the programme's objectives and approach.

8.6 Adaptability and programme resilience

One of the benefits of delivering Fit for Mission at scale has been the ability to respond flexibly as new needs have emerged. As churches have progressed through the change process, the programme has continually adapted its support offer to address challenges and opportunities that were not fully apparent at the outset.

This has included developing new roles, redirecting resource to emerging priorities and adapting team structures as circumstances changed. For example, additional support has been provided to church officers where experience demonstrated a need for more dedicated guidance during periods of significant change.

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The programme has also operated through periods of staffing and leadership change, both within the programme team and more widely across the Diocese. The breadth of expertise within the team, combined with close collaboration across workstreams, has enabled delivery to continue and support to be maintained despite these changes. This flexibility has been an important factor in the programme's ability to sustain progress across multiple cohorts and workstreams simultaneously.

8.7 Support required from the Programme Board

Continued support is needed, particularly in three key areas:

- Maintaining a clear and consistent commitment to the strategic direction of the programme during the final phase of delivery.
- Supporting work on sustainable models for lower-income LSPs and the long-term implications for diocesan strategy and resourcing.
- Supporting an extension of programme activity using existing resources where necessary to ensure that implementation, embedding and knowledge transfer are completed successfully.

9 Review of finances

Overall, the programme remains within its approved funding envelope, with some adjustments between workstreams in response to emerging needs.

Central Project Costs are forecast to be higher than originally planned, reflecting additional costs for key programme roles. This area also contains a contingency fund which will be allocated to support the one-year extension and the embedding of change as Cohort 4 implementation concludes.

Planting and Revitalisation expenditure has increased modestly, largely reflecting the more intensive support provided through the Cultivate programme than was originally anticipated.

Culture Change Management and Support is forecast to be lower than budgeted. This is primarily due to reduced support service costs, reflecting the fact that fewer cohorts progressed through implementation than originally anticipated.

Leadership Development expenditure is also forecast to be lower than budgeted. This reflects a more cost-effective delivery model for coaching, leadership development and support activity, while maintaining sufficient investment to embed new ways of working during the final years of the programme.

Stewardship, Sustainability and Asset Development expenditure remains broadly in line with the original budget, with no significant changes to planned activity.

The largest variance is within Parish Infrastructure, where additional investment has been required to help churches reach the operational, governance, safeguarding and financial standards needed to work effectively within the LSPs.

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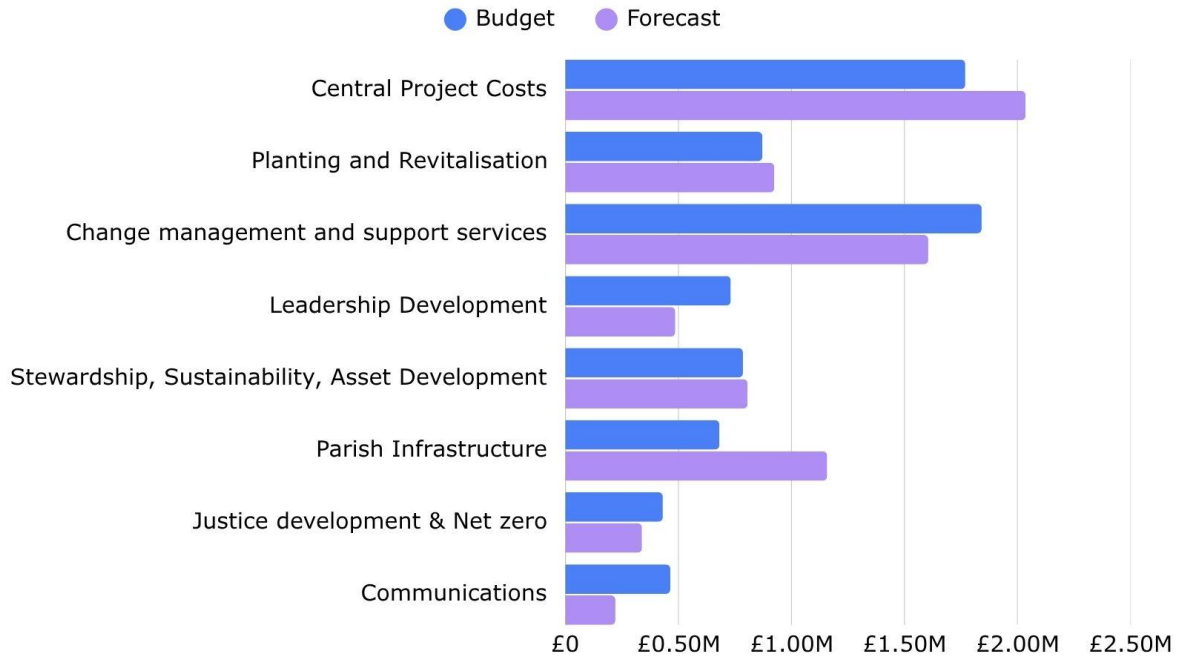
Table 6: Budget and forecasted expenditure at end of Q2 2026



The total FFM grant is £7,574,940. At the end of Q2 2026, £4.07m had been claimed and forecast expenditure to the end of Q4 2026 was £5,042,647. The programme remains within its approved funding envelope. Before the proposed extension is submitted for approval, the forecast will be updated to show expenditure to completion, the resources required for the extension, remaining headroom and the effect of reprofiling between workstreams. Expenditure continues to be managed through the agreed financial-authorisation procedures, regular budget-to-forecast review and reporting to the Programme Board.

10 Key risks

The key risks facing Fit for Mission are not about forming LSPs, but about ensuring that the leadership, systems, culture and resources needed to sustain them remain in place after programme support reduces.

10.1 Leadership continuity, capacity and strategic alignment

The programme has been delivered during a period of significant leadership transition within both the Diocese and the programme team. There is a risk that changes in leadership, competing priorities or differing views on future models of ministry could reduce momentum, create inconsistent messaging or weaken long-term ownership of the programme's objectives.

Mitigation: Ongoing engagement of bishops and senior leaders, integration of programme staff with diocesan teams, knowledge transfer, succession planning and clear communication of diocesan strategy.

10.2 Sustainability of systems and culture after programme support reduces

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Many of the benefits achieved through Fit for Mission depend on strong leadership, governance, accountability, Support Services and collaborative working. There is a risk that these gains are not fully embedded once direct programme support reduces.

Mitigation: Coaching, leadership development, documented processes, peer support networks and integration with MPR to maintain accountability and mission focus beyond the programme period.

10.3 Long-term sustainability of lower-income LSPs

Many LSPs contain a high proportion of churches with limited financial capacity, significant building liabilities and fewer local resources. While collaborative structures have improved resilience, some LSPs may struggle to sustain Support Services, youth provision and other shared resources beyond current funding arrangements.

Mitigation: DIP-funded support through Youth Hubs, Resource Hubs and other shared services provides time to strengthen local income, develop sustainable operating models and explore longer-term support arrangements.

10.4 Clergy capacity and accountability within LSPs

The success of LSPs depends on effective leadership by Team Rectors, Clergy Leadership Teams and local governance structures. Ongoing national challenges in clergy recruitment and deployment increase the risk of vacancies, reduced capacity and weaker accountability.

Mitigation: Leadership development, coaching, peer learning communities, curacy experience within LSPs, vocational pathways and strengthened governance and accountability arrangements.

10.5 Buildings transformation and capital investment

The long-term sustainability of many churches depends on successful implementation of buildings strategies, including investment, repurposing and disposal. Delays in legal processes, disposal activity or access to capital funding could slow progress and prolong building liabilities.

Mitigation: Dedicated Right Buildings support, fundraising expertise, reinvestment planning and partnership working with funders, local authorities and community organisations.

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