

New Directions – February 2026

Summary Note for Distribution

Introduction and Opening Thoughts

The Church of Scotland's life and work stem from our shared calling and covenant with Jesus. We are a community committed to caring for one another, making wise decisions together, and supporting the mission God is calling us into. While finances are tight, with 2027 the year we are to achieve a balanced budget, we are hopeful that practical stewardship, creative use of property, and bold thinking about our resources, can enable mission rather than restrict it. The 2019 reforms that created the new Presbyteries remain vital, pointing towards a more connected, collaborative Church equipped for growth.

Purpose of the Day

For those gathered to explore together what Presbyteries need to thrive, how they are supported, how shared services would work, sustainable funding, and freedom to innovate—all in service of local mission.

Groups drew inspiration from the early Church's practice of sharing so that no one lacked, reminding us that pooled gifts, resources, and imagination multiply impact. Contributions were invited to be open, brave, and hopeful—naming challenges while discerning possibilities.

Group Activity 1: Presbytery Funding Discussion

Question 1: What activities/areas of Presbytery would you consider are core, and why?

- Oversight of Ministers and Ministries
- Governance and Support of Congregations
- Mission Planning and Strategic Development
- Property and Financial Oversight
- Judicial and Disciplinary Functions
- Representation & Connection to the Wider Church
- Pastoral Care & Encouragement

Question 2: What funding is essential for these activities?

- Core staffing: Presbytery Clerk, administrative support, finance and property roles.
- Training & development: continuing ministerial development; training for elders, readers, OLMs, IMs, locums, and Local Worship Leaders; post-training support.
- Safeguarding and compliance infrastructure, including supervision and audit.
- Operational costs for governance (meetings, records, casework) and pastoral care structures.
- Resources for mission enablement and deployment (travel, stipends/fees for supply, retreats).

Group Activity 2: Presbytery Funding – What Works well, Central Support, and Capacity for New Work

Question 1: What currently works well?

- National funding for core roles (clerks, administration, finance, buildings) provides continuity and reduces volunteer burden.

- Presbytery Mission Officers benefit from national development pathways and shared learning.
- Some presbyteries use Local funding for growth funding, which allows for testing small ideas before larger bids.
- Congregations prioritise impact over whether funds are held centrally or locally.
- Core staffing offers continuity; concerns remain about whether Presbyteries were fully costed before reform.

Question 2: What should the central Church support financially within the Presbyteries and why? (if funding was limited what would be prioritised?)

- Funding core Presbytery staffing (clerks, admin, finance, buildings) to ensure governance, continuity, and compliance.
- Prioritising ministries in all forms should be the top priority when funding is constrained.
- Supporting and setting expectations for mission-enabling roles, with national training and communities of practice.
- Providing shared specialist services (HR, Legal, IT, Comms) and welfare provision/employee assistance to support wellbeing and reduce risk.

Question 3: Under current funding arrangements, what capacity do Presbyteries have to initiate new work?

- Many innovations depend on Seeds for Growth; it was noted that the Seeds for Growth processes can be slow and burdensome.
- Some Presbyteries can fund small-scale innovation from reserves, but capacity varies widely.
- Existing models often sustain current work more than they enable new initiatives; greater local decision-making is preferred for mission funding.

Group Activity 3: Presbytery Funding Models and Shared Services

Question 1: How would central funding for Presbytery be packaged within the congregational contributions system?

- Preference for one combined, itemised bill (to show unity and maintain transparency).
- Offer a block grant to Presbyteries after which they determine where and how funding is distributed requiring Presbyteries to be part of the national budgeting process.
- Consider national-level cash collection (leveraging existing payroll systems) while managing cash-flow risks for Presbyteries.
- Congregations value simplicity and clarity: one affordable fee, clearly explained.

Question 2: What is the best methodology for Shared Services?

Three model options were considered:

- **Model A – Flat Fee:** Favoured for simplicity, transparency, and clear accountability; should be presented alongside ministry provision (e.g., a solidarity fund overlay).
- **Model B – Sliding Scale:** Potentially fairer for varied contexts but introduces complexity and dual criteria.
- **Model C – Hybrid:** Minimum flat charge plus a sliding-scale element (potentially capped), with mission-based relief to support churches heavily investing in local mission. Concerns include pressure on the “squeezed middle”.

Additional Considerations

- Explicit modelling and impact data is required before final decisions.
- System must accommodate insolvency legislation and provide a Solidarity Fund for congregations struggling with ministry costs.
- Contribution expectations should be explicit with clear consequences.
- Agreement needed on the scope and cost of shared services.

Theology Discussion – Guiding Principles

- Biblical foundation: one body with mutual care, unity, and particular attention to weaker parts.
- Covenant theology: a living, dynamic relationship rooted in grace; generosity as response to God's gift.
- Stewardship: giving includes time, talents, and money; funding models should encourage generous, sustainable participation.
- Solidarity Fund: two-way seasons—congregations may both give and receive over time.
- Invest in people: if generosity is asked, the Church should invest in developing gifts and removing barriers to mission.

Closing Comments & Next Steps

This session forms part of a wider consultation; no final model has been selected yet.

Notes will be shaped into a briefing for wider sharing; a revised theology paper will follow and be circulated with questions for Kirk Sessions.

The Meeting closed with the saying of Grace