

Funding for Mission in New Housing and Other Development Areas: Key Learning Points

By the staff of the Resource Strategy & Development Unit

Introduction

In 2008-10, the Archbishops' Council and Church Commissioners made £7.25m available to support mission in new housing and other development (e.g. business or retail) areas. The funding was shared between 15 dioceses, of which 14 were allocated £500,000 and one was allocated £200,000.

The aim of the funding was to extend the Church's witness into new areas and to build sustainable Christian communities in those areas. It has mainly been used for pioneer ministers or other outreach posts, for infrastructure projects and to set up mission funds to support parish level mission.

Key learning points are summarised below. These are drawn from seminars, visits to - and reports from - projects, and from an external evaluation¹ of the funding programme.

1. Project Planning

The more information that a diocese can gather about the new developments that are planned, including their likely character and demographics, the more effectively it will be able to plan for mission to them.

Some dioceses facing large-scale new housing developments have **mapped** all the new developments in their area. They have found this research valuable in informing their choices about which new housing developments to focus on and when. Mapping is also helpful for parishes to keep them up to date with what is planned for their area.

Early engagement at parish level allows the diocese to tap into local knowledge, gives churches the opportunity to contribute to and shape the plans - and share their own - and helps achieve local buy-in and support for the plans. It also helps the diocese assess the extent to which local churches are able to support pioneer mission in new housing areas.

2. Engagement with Planners and Developers

Early engagement in the preparation of local planning documents - and cultivating constructive relationships with councillors, planning officers and developers – is crucial if the diocese is to influence new housing developments both in relation to its own aspirations (for example, building a church or school or seeking the provision of a faith space) and to service provision and community facilities. It is sometimes necessary to keep

¹ www.churchgrowthrd.org.uk/news/30.

pushing very hard on community facilities: there are several instances of developers renegeing on their undertakings to provide them.

Guidance on the planning process and on engagement with planners prepared by Peter Morgan, New Communities Development Officer at Oxford diocese is at www.churchgrowthrd.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Resourcing_Mission_Bulletin/Jan_2013/Responding_to_Local_Plan_Making_Consultation.pdf

3. Role of the Local Church

Pioneer work in new housing areas often involves change management in local churches which also need to develop the way in which they work. For many of the projects, the strength of the local church has been a key success factor. Strong active local churches with vibrant congregations have generally been able to help support pioneering work in new housing developments.

Where a new housing development is reasonably small, a vibrant local church may be able to undertake mission to the area on its own, perhaps with some additional support from the diocese. In larger developments, the local church may be able to assist with a specific pioneer project, e.g. by providing line management for a post-holder, administrative support, or by congregation members forming a team to support the project.

Peterborough diocese has developed a tool for assessing proposals from churches for new housing projects:

www.churchgrowthrd.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Resourcing_Mission_Bulletin/July_2014/05_Peterborough.pdf

4. Timing

There is no “one size fits all” model of Church for mission in new housing areas. The research undertaken at the project planning stage will help to identify the best model, for example, a church plant, a pioneer minister, a schools or families and children’s worker, or an extension of the ministry of an existing church.

Whatever the model, the key is to get the mission work going very early on in the life of the new development – preferably at the beginning. Project workers commonly speak of the ‘window of opportunity’ that exists in the early days of a new development. At that stage, people are at their most open to being visited and to being invited to be involved in the emerging life of the community.

5. Intentionality

There are indications that ministry in new housing areas is most effective when it combines a focus on community engagement with intentionality about mission from the beginning.

6. Pioneer Ministers

The Council’s and Commissioners’ funding for new housing areas is supporting several pioneer ministers. Learning points include:

Recruitment

It can be difficult to recruit to pioneer ministry posts in new housing areas but it is crucial to take time to get the appointment right. Rushing to fill a post has on occasion led to appointing the wrong person, with negative consequences for the project and post-holder.

Posts can be lay or ordained and can be drawn from another denomination.

The job description should include milestones, clear outcomes and timescales.

Length of appointment

It generally takes a considerable amount of time for a pioneer minister to establish a worshipping community in a new housing area. Three or even five years is not usually sufficient: it is more realistic to plan for seven or even ten years.

Support

An important part of the preparatory work for pioneer ministry in a new housing area is to invest time and resources in putting in place a team to support him/her from day one. Placing pioneer ministers on their own in new housing developments does not work well. It can lead to their initial energy and time being channelled into creating a team to support them – which can take an inordinately long time – at the expense of effective mission to the community they serve.

Other support should include

- a clear reporting structure
- mentoring
- providing somewhere safe for pioneers to express their concerns and struggles
- regular reviews of the 'starting' outcomes and flexibility to change them as needed
- HR support from the diocese

Location

A pioneer's ministry is most effective when s/he lives on the development to which s/he ministers. Ideally, s/he will be amongst the first to move on to the development.

Sustainability

Sustainability should be built in to pioneer ministry from the beginning, otherwise there is a danger that the work will simply fizzle out when the pioneer post comes to an end. Pioneers themselves should be encouraged to have an early focus on sustainability, both in terms of finance and people.

Funding can be stretched further by using part-time pioneers (many new housing developments have a young demographic and, with residents at work or school during the day, the focus of pioneer ministry is often on the evenings and at weekends), house for duty, or volunteer workers.

7. Buildings

Projects have mostly found that having a space where a worshipping community can meet is important.

Community halls and schools have been found to work well as venues that are inexpensive compared to the cost of a new church building and they provide links to dechurched and non-churched people. Clarity is needed in relation to, for example, insurance, key holders, access and storage space and on health and safety and safeguarding issues.

8. Partnership working

It is essential that those who are responsible for leading mission in new housing areas are skilled at – and enjoy – working with a wide variety of people and organisations because partnership working is key to effective mission in new housing areas. All the projects have engaged in partnership working with other churches and denominations and/or the public and private sectors and/or local trusts and charities.

Some denominations which may not be part of traditional ecumenical groupings (e.g. New Frontiers and Hope Church) are keen to be involved in mission in new housing areas.

Churches Together in England runs a new housing network which meets regularly and makes resources available.

www.cte.org.uk/Groups/44993/Home/Resources/New_Housing_Areas/New_Housing_Areas.aspx

9. Diocesan input

Planning for, executing and overseeing projects in new housing areas can demand substantial amounts of diocesan time. The work needs to be resourced properly at diocesan level if it is to be carried out effectively.

10. Outcomes and Monitoring

To keep the focus on what needs to be done, identify what outcomes (i.e. the changes, impacts, benefits or any effects that take place because of the mission work) the project should, realistically, seek to achieve in the short, medium and long term.

Information that will help to check progress towards achieving outcomes should be collected routinely and systematically from the beginning. Identify the outcome indicators (which describe the progress towards achieving an outcome) and think about how often they will be monitored. There should be a mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators. Information might be gathered using, for example, attendance at worship data, numbers being baptised, giving figures, interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and diaries.

Ensure that reporting mechanisms work well so that lessons from the project are learned and that there is flexibility to refine the outcomes as necessary in the light of the learning.

Further information

For more information, please contact catherine.dorman@churchofengland.org