The role of the GMC Community Chaplain

Reflections for the GMC Leadership Team on my first six months in post

October 2025

The purpose of this report



The purpose of this report is to share my reflections on my experience over the first six months as I have tried to develop and fulfil the aims of the new role of GMC Community Chaplain, created to 'help the churches of the Mission Community fulfil our vocation to love and serve Christ in our neighbour, as the second commandment calls us to do'.

The original role profile emphasised that there was 'no inherited structure or set of expectations, leaving the person appointed free to innovate and put his or her own stamp on the post, in collaboration with colleagues'. This report sets out how I have tried to do that up until now and how I see that process continuing.

It is addressed to the GMC Leadership Team, who devised and appointed me to this role, to help them reflect on and guide this work for the future.

These reflections fall into the following sections:

- the remit and scope of the role
- first impressions of the context
- my approach to this work
- key principles
- initial challenges
- snapshots from the first six months
- reflections and suggestions for the next phase.



The remit and scope of the role

Vision for the role

(taken from the original role profile in December 2024)

"The post of Community Chaplain in the Grasmoor Mission Community is a new post that has been created specifically to help the churches of the Mission Community fulfil our vocation to love and serve Christ in our neighbour, as the second commandment calls us to do. It is also rooted in the 'Care Deeply' element of our diocesan 'God for All' vision. This means that there is no inherited structure or set of expectations, leaving the person appointed free to innovate and put his or her own stamp on the post, in collaboration with colleagues...

We will also be looking to you to help our churches and church members think theologically about the way in which we see and serve Christ in one another, including those of other faiths or none. Our hope is that in building relationships with a wide range of other groups and organisations that also serve our communities, people may gain a better understanding of who we are as churches and feel more able to approach and partner with us in fruitful ways. If this leads to people wishing to explore aspects of Christian believing or become more involved in the life of the Church we would see that as a bonus. We feel the title Chaplain helps to position the role in this way."

Three key intentions for the role

This 'vision' expresses three separate but complimentary key intentions for the role.



- Fostering engagement of churches and their members in supporting our GMC communities (individually, as churches, and as the GMC as a whole) and particularly the most vulnerable and excluded members of those communities

- Supporting/initiating community development initiatives in response to evident need in those communities

- The role itself as a resource to others (embodying the churches' offer to wider communities) – connecting, communicating and facilitating community engagement

[For full descriptions of six key roles set out in the original job profile – broadly, a theological resource, relationship-building and networking, research into grants/funding, communications, church meetings and collaboration with Churches Together in Cumbria – see the appendix: *Activity in the first six months*.]

First impressions of the context

Church context

(taken from the original role profile)

"The Grasmoor Mission Community is an excellent context for the post with a lively market town hub and a number of surrounding smaller villages, all of which have close knit individual communities that are generally well disposed towards the church, even if this doesn't express itself readily in church attendance. Particularly in those places where church attendance is significantly reducing we are now looking for other ways of connecting into the community and this post will be instrumental in helping us reflect on that and develop new forms of engagement.

You will be part of a strong ministry team with clergy colleagues who are responsible for all the traditional aspects of church ministry, releasing you for more outward facing activities. Through CTiCA (Churches Together in the Cockermouth Area) we also have warm links with a number of other denominations and local faith communities and a long history of working well together. Many church members are already very active in the wider community and some of our buildings are extensively used by various community organisations."

Social context and challenges



- Access to services
  - Withdrawal of services from local area
  - Poor public transport
  - Ageing/housebound population
  - Reliance on digital services/digital exclusion

- Mental health and isolation
  - Rural population, especially farmers
  - Reluctance to ask for help
  - Lack of local hubs/opportunities for social interaction, especially young/working-age people
  - Overstretched/inaccessible mental health services

- Young people
  - Lack of informal (family) support
  - Insufficient options for/availability of out-of-school activities
  - Lack of public transport to reach activities out of area

- Community activities and voluntary sector generally
  - Decline in participation
  - Decline in availability of volunteers
  - Lack of funding/support in non-urban areas

My approach to this work

What I have brought

Over the past ten years I have worked as a volunteer manager (and winter shelter coordinator) for the homelessness charity Manna House in Kendal, as a support worker, volunteer trainer and manager (and wellbeing activity and helpline manager) for the addiction charity CADAS across Cumbria and, latterly, as the Coordinator of the first South Lakes Poverty Truth Commission.

My experience as lifelong volunteer myself – chairing a Chamber of Trade and a parish council, running a village plan process, setting up a credit union, serving as a school governor and helping set up a youth club, among other things – has taught me a lot about how communities and the bodies that seek to support them work, how initiatives spring up and what works and what doesn't. And my experience as a volunteer trainer and manager has taught me even more about what motivates, equips and supports different people to volunteer.

My recent work with the Poverty Truth Commission – including working alongside and networking with experts in the field of community development – led me on a steep learning curve.

Among other things, it taught me the necessity of patient deep listening in order for the voices of some of the most vulnerable and unheard people in our local communities to be heard and thereby release their wisdom and life experience into the policy-making processes of local government and services. It taught me how to do it and why it's well worth doing. I also learned a lot from the members of the PTC as they shared with me their diverse life experiences and perspectives – as farmers, as addicts, as people under the crisis mental health team, as domestic abuse survivors – in a society which does not know how to support them well.



Developing a methodology for this work

My starting point in approaching this work has naturally been to draw on my experience meeting and working with vulnerable people in a rural area for the South Lakes Poverty Truth Commission.

Poverty Truth Commissions follow a particular model in order to enable leaders and decision-makers in a local community to form lasting, open and trusting relationships with people with lived experience of poverty. Once the group has 'formed', out of their shared commitment to improving the lives of people in poverty, they work together to find changes that can be made, to local policy and processes, and commit to embedding those changes together.

The role of the coordinator is first to build their own relationship with prospective members of the group, to help them to feel safe enough to take part in the process, then to facilitate relationships within the group and then to let the group lead.

The ethos of the Poverty Truth Network (the umbrella organisation of the PTCs) is encapsulated in two well-known phrases:

- 'nothing about us, without us, is for us' – actions made to help others, without the involvement of the people they are intended to help, are unlikely to be well received or successful

- 'if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together' – actions made by a few, for the benefit of the whole community, are unlikely to result in significant, lasting change to that community, and engagement of that wider community will require a longer, slower process.

Although it would not be appropriate to try and replicate the formal methods of a PTC in this current role, these principles are relevant to bear in mind if we want to enable lasting change, for the benefit not only of the excluded and vulnerable but of their communities.



It is not easy working in this way, but, in my experience and the experience of others working in the poverty truth field, it is the only way to serve those who are most excluded and vulnerable, and the results can be transformative.

Key principles

I believe key principles in the current task of enabling our churches to serve their neighbours to the best of their ability should include:

Bottom-up rather than top-down
Churches, like other established institutions, are in the habit of offering what they believe their neighbours want (or ought to want, or used to want, or want in other places), rather than asking their neighbours what they lack. The former is easier, but much less rewarding for those giving and those receiving, than the latter.



Responsive not programmatic
To truly meet people's needs, it is necessary to wait until they can express those needs and then be prepared to respond quickly enough to be of use. Resources (people, time, material goods) need to be available, not taken up with pre-determined programmes of action.

Person-centred not prescriptive
Every situation will be different. Although we can learn from experiences and projects across our churches, across our county (through Church Together, eg) and nationally (eg Cinnamon Trust), what works in Bridekirk will not simply transfer to Buttermere – ever!

Relational not transactional
Positive, lasting change comes when people cooperate to fulfil a shared aim and establishing a foundation/conditions for this takes a long time. Engagement and cooperation, from intended beneficiaries and volunteers, for example, will depend on building relationships of mutual trust and respect. The most vulnerable people may be unwilling to ask for help, particularly in smaller, more affluent communities. Volunteers also need to be recognised for who they are. (See, eg, the Active Change Management methodology.)



Not led by data…
Another lesson from my recent work is the inadequacy of available data as a measure of how deprivation is experienced in rural areas, as well as the paucity of detailed, local data in areas of low population-density (or low deprivation, according to existing measures).

Many websites present the data that has been captured (eg by the Census) in different ways (See the appendix *Activity in the first Six Months*).

In general, the data reveals the communities of the GMC to be roughly average for Cumbria for most of the standard indicators and in some cases slightly above average in income and education levels. Some of our parishes are too small for percentages and rankings to be significant. In addition to which, much information (for example numbers of people claiming benefits or other support) depends on take-up of services – something that, as we know, is limited in rural areas by many factors such as lack of public transport or nature of employment (hospitality or farming, for example).

The National Lottery are reviewing their use of data for grant-making in rural areas at the moment and very recent research by the Diocese of Truro backs up this point (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx2pdmj4782o).

…but by lived experience
Effective community development cannot, in any case, be *led* by data. Our aim in this role is to support our neighbours in the issues that seem most relevant to them and their communities. People do not recognise themselves in data and we do not have the resources to take action to tackle any needs that we can identify anecdotally 'top down' without the insight and engagement of people who have them, and in any case many of these are due to social/economic structural inequalities and national policies.



Many other third sector and specialist organisations are better equipped to offer that support – and they do. (The NHS Social Prescribers at our local ICB have a spreadsheet of over 600 local organisations and services, to which they are constantly adding.)



The appropriate way to use this data is as a resource, as and when we want to research the potential for a particular project in a particular area, in response to a local need.

For example, a need very much in the media and a concern shared by members of the GMC leadership team at our first meeting about this role (and included in 'First impressions of the context' above), was support for the farming community, particularly with regard to mental health. There are many reports in the public domain on this subject (eg *Ploughing Through Barriers*, Healthwatch North Yorkshire, 2025).

However, the farming organisations (such as the Agricultural Chaplaincy, Farmers Community Network, the Farmer Network and RABI) are well aware of the issue and have developed resources for farmers struggling with their mental health – from helplines to online counselling tools for different ages. Although church members can make people aware of these things, it would be inappropriate for us to respond to the data by trying to solve social problems that others are better equipped to address.



Initial challenges

Over the first six months of the work, there have been particular challenges to fulfilling the expectations laid out in the role profile, and the goals for the probationary period (see Appendix), which I believe can be resolved for the next phase.

These can be summarised as:



- Unrealistic expectations for a role that is 21 hours a week, across a large rural patch without support, leaving very little time for reflective practice or thorough record-keeping

- Novelty and therefore undefined nature of the role in combination with no clear mechanism for accessing practical support or collaboration from colleagues

- Lack of clarity about priorities – for example, community 'engagement' or community 'development'? The initial vision for the role leans towards 'engagement' but genuinely altruistic service of our neighbours would lean towards 'development' (see *A Short Guide to Community Development* (Gilchrist, A and Taylor, M (2025). Policy Press)

Reflection rather than reporting

One of the goals for the probationary period was to publish a 'substantial report' on what has been 'discovered' and 'opportunities for community engagement'.

For all the reasons outlined in the previous section, I believe this would be premature and likely to pre-empt or even stymie the intention to be genuinely community-led.

Any broad judgments made about the need in our communities (such as 'Social context and challenges' above) can only be first impressions, on the basis of preconceptions, hearsay, publicly-available data (limited as it is) and conversations with those individuals who have been willing and able to offer their time and wisdom so far. There are still many key figures with whom we have yet to engage. In addition, those whom we have met are likely to be 'gatekeepers' or 'connectors' – people who may, in time, be willing to help us meet the more excluded and vulnerable people in their communities.

In fact, until we engage deeply in particular situations in particular locations we are not likely to meet the people we most want to hear and help and therefore we cannot know what is needed. Instead, in order to help the GMC Leadership Team reflect on and guide the development of the Community Chaplain role, I am sharing examples of, and reflections on, my work so far. I believe this will best illustrate the potential of the role and guide priorities for the future.

Snapshots from the first six months

I offer here some examples of the kind of responsive, case-by-case work which has arisen for me in this role – alongside all the other day-to-day responsibilities outlined in the initial role description. They have arisen out of the relationship and network-building that I have tried to make my primary focus in the limited time available.

I believe these show the range of ways in which this role could be best used to serve our neighbours, while also building lasting trust and respect between the churches and our local communities.

A very brief summary of my work so far – against all the elements of the role identified at the outset – is provided in the appendix.

Clifton after-school clubs

Of all the church parishes in the GMC area (for which there is significant data), Clifton has the second highest population after Brigham (outside the Cockermouth Area Team) of about 1600, the highest proportion of young families, the highest social housing and the lowest level of qualifications. It has a small primary school with varying attendance due to children who move about between homes and family members. It used to have a flourishing rugby league club but that has closed in recent years and there is no organised activity for young people now except the two after-school clubs, during term-time.

For several decades, Clifton Methodist Church has had 'Friday Club' – an after-school club on a Friday afternoon. In recent years, it has been run by a local resident who has been involved for over 40 years (now in her 90s), the two churchwardens at St Luke's, Bridgefoot (one a Clifton resident, parent governor at the school, mum of one of the members – and one from Stainburn) and a member of the local Methodist clergy term. When I started in this role, sessions had fallen to once a month because of



competing pressures on all parties and consequent fall-off in attendance (members not sure which week was which, not being able to rely on it).

In response to rising vandalism and anti-social behaviour, in January 2019 a Trust was established to set up another drop-in after-school club, Great Clifton Community Youth Group, at the village hall. This has struggled to maintain a presence, over the years, despite the huge commitment of one of the parish councillors (now in his 80s) and, more recently, one of the mums. When sessions run tens of primary-age children come along to race about and play games for up to two hours.

Over the summer, the GMC church leaders agreed to commit to a focus on supporting the two Clifton churches, part of which would be developing Friday Club and looking for other ways to support the local community in Clifton. We have now made the club fortnightly. I have joined the regular volunteer team and helped with creating a rota, distributing new flyers (by hand at the annual Fun Day and online) and baking! Attendance is up and enthusiastic at the moment. Christina and I have also talked to church people living in the local area about volunteering but with no success as yet. If we could recruit one more person, even to help only once a month, I would step down.

I have also spoken to Trustees and volunteers at the GCCYG and been along to a club sessions and the annual Fun Day run by the Trust. They are in desperate need of two new Trustees. I have publicised these vacancies but had no success in encouraging church members to step forward for those roles as yet. My next step would be to help them advertise outside the church (eg through Cumbria CVS or my monthly stakeholder emails).

T'Gether @ No 93



About 18 months ago, Age UK West Cumbria suddenly folded, leaving the activity groups that were based at their premises at No 93, Main Street, Cockermouth without any support. Jen who ran the exercise groups stepped in to save the part-time manager and the groups by setting up T'Gether CIC to pay the manager, rent the premises and support the members and groups. She kept it all running in some form for about a year and then had to pull out.

A member of T'Gether (and Christ Church) approached me to say that the groups were facing eviction and didn't know what to do next. Between us, we ended up holding a series of meetings, before the tenancy ran out, to work out the options. I consulted Cumbria CVS and reported back, one member brought her husband (a town councillor) to the meetings and he briefed us on funding and the Christ Church Treasurer and Property Manager came along to discuss options for hosting the groups there. At our

final meeting, the CEO from Age UK North Cumbria came along and offered help with coordinating and publicising the group into the future.

All the groups have now found new premises, we have been publicising that information through websites, Facebook, village newsletters and emailings, and Age UK NC has taken many of the groups on under their Age Friendly Coordinator's role.

Cockermouth Relief in Need

Early on in my role I met one of the Trustees of Cockermouth Relief in Need because I knew (from previous conversations) that the Trustees were disappointed in the lack of applications for their small grants from GMC-area residents over recent years. This was a common story in my previous work that people have money to offer and struggle to get it to people who need it, although there is plenty of need.

I also had conversations with the member of our clergy team who liaises most closely with our schools about how the information had been provided to schools in the past, and also the changing nature of school life (fewer of the trips that grants had often been used to cover, for example, since Covid).

We agreed to send out the information in a new form to schools – as an attractive, simple poster for the staff room, rather than in a formal letter to the Headteacher, at the start of the autumn term – and also to ask churches, stakeholders/partners, village newsletters to share the poster/information, and share it digitally on the GMC websites and Facebook pages.

Cockermouth Community-Led Plan



It was agreed by Cockermouth Town Council last year to develop a Community-Led Plan for the town, to feed into the new Cumberland Plan and also to guide the Town Council's agenda for the future. If done well, it will be a chance to 'hear' the voices of the myriad different communities and groups in the town and in the villages around the town who 'look to' Cockermouth as a hub.

At about the time that the Steering Group was being pulled together, I was living in Cockermouth and happened to be meeting the Chair of the Group, one of the Town Councillors. Seeing an opportunity to form working relationships with other key Cockermouth organisations and also to shape the process and demonstrate the churches' willingness to contribute to the life of the town, I volunteered to join the small group.

The group has been slow to get going but we are now working towards a soft launch from the beginning of 2026 and a Visioning Day at around Easter, at Lorton Street Methodist Church. Other members of the group whom I have now got to know (through 1:1 meetings) include the Chamber of Trade, Civic Trust, Rotary Club and the Mayor. I will be actively encouraging the village and town churches (along with their neighbours)

to participate in the consultation process so that the eventual Plan fully reflects the needs and aspirations of all the area's local population. I anticipate that the development of the Plan will highlight opportunities for churches to collaborate with our communities in responding to their concerns.

Diocesan Chaplaincy Steering Group

Shortly after starting this role, I was invited by Archdeacon Vernon Ross to become a member of the diocesan Chaplaincy Steering Group. Seeing this as part of my (separate but complementary) countywide role for Churches Together in Cumbria, I accepted.

The group is working on mapping the many and varied chaplaincies across Cumbria, clarifying the nature of those roles (lay or ordained, for example, denominational or non-denominational) as well as developing training and perhaps credentials to support the work. It has given me an opportunity to explore other models of chaplaincy and what training might be available, now and in the future, to equip members of our churches to perform 'community chaplain' roles in their communities. (For example, the North Lakes Foodbank has now employed lay people as chaplains to their volunteers and I have been approached by them for advice about training for their roles.)

Other projects in the pipeline

- *Supporting lift-sharing schemes in Lorton Vale and Bridekirk*
  After a meeting with a volunteer from Melbreak Communities I was invited to join their Net Zero group to discuss a lift-sharing scheme for people without cars in Lorton Vale. I asked contacts at ACT and Cumbria CVS for guidance on the best way to proceed and the group agreed protocols for a WhatsApp group-based scheme which has now been running with 40+ participants for a couple of months. I mentioned this scheme to a church member in Bridekirk and she is keen to investigate the interest in something similar in the Bridekirk/Papcastle/Tallentire area and willing to coordinate it should it be wanted.



- *Lorton Street Methodist Church consultation on redevelopment*
  I have started conversations with Nick Baker on how we could facilitate user group/community engagement and consultation around their potential redevelopment work, in support of funding bids and fundraising if the work is to go ahead.

- *Sharing resources for digital inclusion/promoting Digital Champion training*
  Linked to conversations about lift-sharing schemes have been various conversations about digital inclusion – helping people access the many resources which are increasingly only available online (a concern raised again at the Gathering Day on Artificial Intelligence).

  The local ICB has also asked for help in promoting training for, and use of, the NHS apps, and I have been invited to attend the Digital Inclusion Network by the person responsible for Digital Champions training in this area. If the churches are keen to help with this work, this is something we could devote some time and resources to enabling. (There has recently been a great digital inclusion project in Broughton, involving local primary school children and the village hall, funded by the Cumbria Community Foundation, for example.)

- *Youth cafes/clubs in Broughton and Lorton Vale*
  Members of the clergy team are keen to revive youth work in Broughton and in Lorton Vale. This may be something that this role could support in terms of gauging the level of local need or support.

Other ongoing responsibilities

- A lot of time was devoted in the first month or so to developing the GMC website and Facebook page and supporting the volunteers who manage A Church Near You websites and local church Facebook pages.

- A significant amount of time is now dedicated to regular, general communications work internally and externally for the GMC and, additionally, raising the profile of the churches' social action, sharing information on behalf of partner organisations and maintaining the new network of CC contacts.

- Ongoing work will also continue to include gathering and looking out for latest information on grants/funding, statutory and other services and community groups, and data on local demography and sociology.

Reflections and suggestions for the next phase

Celebrations

I have loved every moment of my time out in the community and felt very privileged to represent the GMC in this way.

- The role has been extremely well received in the local communities.
    - People are very keen to be asked about their perspective on community life and have a wide range of views about what there is to celebrate or lament
    - People are in general surprised and glad to see the church coming to them (rather than inviting them to come to it). I have been met with only one clear expression of resistance to 'church' involvement in 'secular' spaces
    - People welcome clarity on how the churches operate, what the GMC is and who to contact about what
    - Most people are too busy to be aware of more than a fraction of what is going on around them but are keen to be informed and better connected with others
    - There are various lines of division in all our communities which work against community cooperation and flourishing which it may be possible to soften through this role and this feels an important calling at this time.

- I have felt hugely welcome and supported by members of the GMC and particularly valued their interest in and prayer for my work.

- It has been rewarding to have been available, and to have found the combination of my experience and resources (such as knowledge about/links with local organisations) quickly developed in the role to be relevant, so that I could be of practical use in particular situations as they have arisen.



Reflections

- Relationship, partnership and network-building is the core of community development work (see *The well-connected community: a networking approach to community development*. (Gilchrist, A (2019) Policy Press). In itself it is a significant and unique service to our neighbours.

- There is potential to take this relationship-building further and do much more, if members of the GMC can be encouraged, inspired and equipped to reach out beyond the usual or easier connections and forge meaningful links with fellow congregations and community groups.

- More broadly, this role should be about enabling others, and sharing the work with individual churches, perhaps ideally developing a network of community social action-focused volunteers taking responsibility for creating and maintaining local networks and being alert to local need in order to make proposals for action.

- The need for practical support and guidance to enable the Community Chaplain to prioritise and act confidently with the authority of the GMC has been underestimated. Some support needs to be put in place.

- The aspirations for the first six months proved unreasonable within the time. In addition, more time for recording and reflecting in a way that could be shared with the wider team (the lack of which has contributed to the huge effort required to write this report) would have been valuable.



Suggestions

- To make the most out of this pioneering new role of Community Chaplain for the Grasmoor Mission Community in the future, I believe we must:
    - prioritise the elements of the role
    - drop elements that could be provided by other means or dispensed with altogether
    - guard against ad hoc responsibilities being added to the remit (this is not an unlimited clergy role, but an extremely time-poor one!)
    - find a way to provide regular, responsive, experienced support for the role to enable ongoing prioritisation and authorisation
    - allow time for recording, reflection and reporting to enable consultation, teamwork and reflective practice
    - manage expectations – within and outwith the churches
    - be prepared to accept longer and unpredictable timescales for action.

- The role must be allowed to be responsive/adaptive rather than required to meet specific predetermined outcomes or follow a predetermined strategy.

  If we cannot respond to individuals in need, we will be letting them down. If we cannot respond when partners ask us for help, within a reasonable timeframe, we will lose the trust and respect we will have worked hard to build up.

Appendix: Activities in the first six months

This gives a brief summary of work carried out (in black) in respect of goals agreed in March for the first six months in post (in red) in respect of the points of the original role description (black italics).

KEY ROLES

- *To be a theological resource to the Grasmoor Mission Community, enabling the churches to reflect prayerfully on and live out our vocation to love and serve Christ in our neighbour, caring deeply for all.*

  Accept invitations to speak about the role and our understanding of it as a practical outworking of the gospel. Because the role is new and may not be what some people think it is/ ought to be it's important to establish a shared positive perception early on.

  Invitations to speak (within the GMC):
  - Christ Church AGM
  - GMC Leadership Team (June 2025)
  - Christ Church Leadership Team Meeting
  - Buttermere PCC/Lorton PCC
  - Church/parish newsletters: Eaglesfield, Dean, Bridekirk, Lorton, Broughton

  cf preaching on Community at Loweswater Show (indirectly so at Bluebell Service)

  Substantial meetings with GMC church leaders/clergy/churchwardens including: Nick B, Alistair S, Wendy S, Ken K, Kris L, Barbara B, Christina B, Norman M, Jan C-W, Samm M, Sue S, David H (Cockermouth Relief in Need), Meredyth B (Village Post (Bridekirk and around)), Bob C (CC treasurer)... and multiple conversations after church at Bridekirk, Broughton, Lorton, Loweswater, Christ Church and Cockermouth URC.

- *To build relationships with the various community and charitable organisations based in Cockermouth and around the Grasmoor Mission Community, actively seeking opportunities to work in partnership with them to benefit those living and working within our area, and especially the disadvantaged and those in need. To be a conduit of this information to our churches, encouraging and equipping our members to get involved in this aspect of our mission in a range of different ways.*

  Get to know the life of our churches, how they function and how they serve the wider community
  See above.

  Familiarise with the geography and sociology of the area covered by Grasmoor Mission Community and surrounds in order to inform others.
  Data has been gathered from:

- Carlisle Diocese (Kerry Roughton) by GMC Church Parishes – population, area, congregation, church presence, deprivation rankings
- Cumbria Community Foundation (Becca Dunlop) – Local Insight reports by Cockermouth area council wards

Also

- Ageing Well report from HealthWatch Cumberland (April 2025)
- Co-Curate civil parish profiles (map, local govt structure, history, pop etc)
- And visits to local parish councils etc

These are some of the sources used by the church, local government, the local health service and funders and fund managers such as Cumbria Community Fund. Help is also available from officers at some of these organisations to trawl through them for particular reports.

- Nomis (available by council wards, have downloaded some data on St John's & Clifton, all accessible here: https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea)
- Cumbria Intelligence Observatory (Val Ayre) – reports for council wards (population, economy, housing, health, children & YP qualifications/income, crime, deprivation, 'environment')
- Church Urban Fund (https://cuf.org.uk/shinealight by church parish)

I have also now been given a copy of the Cockermouth NHS Social Prescribing Team's spreadsheet of over 600 Cumbrian/local services/websites/groups/sports clubs (maintained by Eric Field who is happy for us to use it).

Meet stakeholders and relevant people to establish a working relationship.

Have built up a stakeholder email list of 150+ (including some church people) to continue to update with work, progress and build relationships

Substantial conversations with:

- Parish & town councillors, Cumberland councillors (inc council leader), local MP (soon)
- Meetings with council staff in Community Development, Social Prescribing, Learning Development, Public Health etc teams at various levels
- Head and Pastoral Lead at Cockermouth School (soon)
- NHS Social Prescribers (local ICB)
- Suzanne Elsworth (CofT comms)
- Civic Trust (Martin & Darren), Soroptimists, WI (Cockermouth and Dean), Mothers' Union (West Cumbria), Rotary, Scouts…
- Cockermouth Christian Centre, RC, King's Church contacts/leaders
- Linking Lives, Safe Families, NL Foodbank

- *To acquire a working knowledge of charitable and grant making bodies that may be able to support us in this work, including developing bids as appropriate.*
  Lois will naturally gather information about charitable and grant making bodies as she moves around the community and meets people. Developing bids will belong to a later phase of the work once we have an agreed plan of action.

Meetings with:

- Sue O'Neill, CDO attached to the Lakes to Sea Panel, about grants available from local councillors in most of the GMC
- Mark Fryer, Leader of Cumberland Council, about grants available from local councillors in the Workington Area through the Working Together Panel (for Great Clifton)
- Cockermouth Town Councillors about grants available from them (including Cockermouth & Papcastle Recreational Fund and Metalcraft (Cockermouth)
- Cumbria Community Foundation (Becca Dunlop and Caroline Adams) about their grant-making process/criteria
- Together We Fundraising in Cleator Moor – business specialising in helping charities apply for money (recommended by Cumbria CVS only in certain circumstances)

Already familiar with Cumbria CVS 4 Community funding-finder portal.
Looking out for advice/documents eg recent BeFundable report.

- *To lead on our external communications including maintaining the Grasmoor Mission Community website and Grasmoor Mission Community Facebook Page and looking for other creative ways to raise our profile in our local communities and beyond.*
  We recognise the importance of digital and online engagement for the Church's mission and ministry in today's society. Good internal and external comms will be key to the success of the role. While we don't want this to become a major use of Lois's time we see the benefit of having an early review and springclean of our comms so Lois will give particular attention to this in the first six months.

- Website updated, simplified, maintained regularly with plans to add social action page, schools ministry page etc
- Local church Facebook pages and their editors identified and support offered
- A Church Near You pages made safeguarding-compliant and consistent in terms of GMC contact details
- GMC Facebook page kept active and relevant and followers slowly increasing as different topics are covered and organisations tagged, also interaction with local church FB pages encouraged and improved
- Building up regular contact/relationships with village/church newsletter editors, and Facebook editors/groups, offering content from time to time
- Building a relationship with Suzanne Elsworth and the Chamber of Trade communications channels – have signed the GMC up to the Chamber of

Trade for a presence on the Cockermouth Online website and gathered and provided material for a double page spread in the next Cockermouth Town on churches and Christmas and will be encouraging better use of the listings page, monthly eNews, Cockermouth Online website by our churches

Aiming to

- promote/improve circulation/readership of Staying Connected through clergy and congregations and changes in content/format
- improve internal comms within the GMC leadership group through regular email updates
- improve external comms through regular email updates to growing list of partners in the local community

- *To attend relevant meetings including the Grasmoor Mission Community Leadership Group, Churches Together in the Cockermouth Area Church Leaders Group, Deanery Synod and others as appropriate.*
  As Lois is part time it may not be possible or desirable for her to attend every meeting. Team Meeting and GMC Leadership Group may be the ones to prioritise but we'll get a feel for this as Lois establishes herself in the role.

  Currently attending only the GMC Leadership Group regularly.

  Have attended Chapter meeting, Synod meeting, Clergy Team meetings and CTiCA Church Leaders' Group meeting but not intending to continue to do that unless invited to contribute as Community Chaplain in some way.

  If we were to establish a regular CTiCA group – for lay people as well as the leaders – I would be keen to attend that, as a good opportunity to get to know people from the other denominations, as part of my community relationship-building. (I have met all the denominational leaders individually.)

- *To work collaboratively with the Churches Together in Cumbria Social Responsibility Forum and those engaged in this work on behalf of the Diocese of Carlisle.*
  Lois has begun a one day a week role with CTiC which will probably be known as Social Responsibility Lead (West). She will explore the intersection of the two roles and look for fruitful opportunities for collaboration.

  My role with CTiC is roughly 28 hours a month (highly variable), as one of three members of the countywide Community Social Action Team and initial contact for West Cumbria and Central Lakes (and also for Local Groups, Chaplaincy, Mental Health & Wellbeing, Domestic Violence, Poverty and Rural Affairs to date).

  Over the first few months my main focus has been getting to know local CT groups around the county. As I explore what ecumenism, chaplaincy and social action look like around the county, and how CTiC could support these things better, I

discover resources which could be used in the GMC, and my growing experience in the GMC informs my understanding of what might work elsewhere.

If the post holder is a Church of England Minister the opportunity exists alongside this employment to fulfil your ministry in the Grasmoor Mission Community and diocese of Carlisle. In the case of a Reader this would include sharing in planning and leading Sunday and weekday worship and occasional offices, preaching, and engaging in pastoral work.
Although Lois's Reader ministry is separate from her paid employment it provides an additional platform for her to get to know churches and people and share what she is seeking to achieve as Community Chaplain. Liturgical commitments are flexible and negotiable.

We see the first 6 months of Lois's employment as a 'deep listening' phase. At six months we expect to receive a substantial report with relevant data that can also be shared as a presentation on what Lois has discovered and what opportunities she sees for the churches to develop our community engagement across the Grasmoor Mission Community.