



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
**Diocese of
Manchester**
Board of Finance

Parsonage House Guidance Notes on Vacancies

Introduction

These notes should be read in conjunction with the Parsonage Handbook 2006 and Interregna Notes to Sequestrators, issued by the Diocesan Registrar. The notes are prepared to offer guidance to departing incumbents and churchwardens. By following the notes, the committee will be greatly assisted in its work. If you need any further advice or assistance, please contact the Property Secretary.

General Vacancy Procedures

1.1 It is essential that the Property Secretary is contacted as soon as a move date is known.

Before leaving a parsonage house the clergy person should arrange for all gas, electricity, telephone and other meters to be read and accounts forwarded to their new address. None of these services should be disconnected as they involve reconnection charges and inconvenient delays. The churchwardens should also read the meters on the first day of the vacancy.

When vacating a parsonage, the Clergy person should ensure that it is left in a clean and tidy condition. All rubbish should be disposed of, cupboards cleaned, floors swept and garden tidied. The house keys are to be left with the churchwardens.

When the house is vacated the Property Secretary, along with the churchwardens will carry out an inspection to view its condition. The Area Dean and/or Chairman of the Property Committee may also be in attendance.

During a vacancy the churchwardens are responsible, with the assistance of the Property Department, for the security and condition of the house. Empty houses are prone to vandal attack. The PCC is asked to do all it can to protect a house by keeping up an appearance of habitation (e.g. having curtains at windows and lights on time switches) and advising the police of the vacancy. The garden should be kept tidy and free from litter to avoid the appearance of dilapidation. The PCC should also arrange that the house is visited, if possible, on a daily basis to check its security and clear mail. As a last resort the committee will consider boarding up the property, however, this can be counter-productive as it advertises the fact that the house is empty. Further advice on these matters can be obtained from the Property Secretary.

During the vacancy the Board of Finance will reimburse the parish for a reasonable amount of gas and electricity charges for heating and maintaining the house during a winter period, providing that the following control settings are used:

Boiler thermostat set at 140° Fahrenheit (60° Centigrade).

The room thermostat set at 45° Fahrenheit (7° Centigrade).

The time clock set to operate from 02:00 to 05:00 and 20:00 to 22:00.

Arrangements are to be made for someone to pay regular visits to ensure the boiler is working (and if oil fired to check the oil levels). The above is only to be undertaken when it is known that the boiler is protected by a frost-stat. If the boiler is not protected or it is expected to be a prolonged vacancy, the whole system must be drained together with the domestic water system and the rising main turned off. In addition the gas should be turned off at the meter (do not have it disconnected) and circuit breakers that are not required switched off. Please note that before relighting the boiler you should ensure that the system has been refilled and tested.

Financial Matters

2.1 Once the parsonage is vacated and unfurnished it is exempt from council tax charges as long as it is being held vacant for a minister of religion. The local authority is to be informed accordingly.

Once the house is vacant and unfurnished it is exempt from the payment of water rates and United Utilities should be informed accordingly.

Gas, electricity and telephone bills should be paid by the parish and reasonable bills can be reclaimed the Board of Finance using the claim forms provided.

Letting of Parsonages – no person or persons are to take up residence in a parsonage house during a vacancy without the written approval of the Property Committee. The Property Secretary may, with the co-operation of the PCC arrange tenants to occupy the house during the vacancy. For more information on the letting of parsonage houses, contact the Property Secretary.

Insurance – all parsonages for which the Property Committee has responsibility are insured under a comprehensive policy. If a house suffers damage from thieves, vandals, storm or accident, then the Diocesan Office should be notified as soon as possible. It is a condition of the insurance that if the damage was malicious, the local police are to be informed. The Property Committee only insures the house not the contents, therefore, any parish property within the vacant house should be covered on the parish insurance policy.

Neglect of Houses – should the Property Department feel that those responsible have not taken reasonable care of the house they may decide to charge them for the cost of works consequent upon this failing. The Repair of Benefice Buildings Measure covers such action if it is felt necessary.

Repair of Benefice Measure 1972 extract: whether the report of a diocesan surveyor, whether under section 4 or section 7 of this Measure, specifies any repair to a parsonage house as necessary by reason of damage caused or aggravated by any deliberate act of the incumbent or a previous incumbent or any default in his duties under this section, the Board may, on completion of the repairs, by notice require the incumbent concerned or his personal representative to pay them the whole or part of the cost certified by the diocesan surveyor to be attributable to the said act or default and, if the notice is not complied with, the Board may take proceedings for the enforcement thereof.

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