

DIOCESE OF NEWCASTLE



HOUSE VACANCY ACCOMMODATION GUIDE FOR PARISHES

'The Houses & Glebe Committee share in supporting clergy and their family through the maintenance and care of their home in the mission and ministry of the Church'



Introduction

It is the wish of the Houses & Glebe Committee that all vacant houses will continue to be maintained to the same standard as when it was occupied. Every member of clergy who is provided with a new home is asked to care for the house and gardens with the Houses & Glebe Committee responsible for the main repairs and improvements.

There are many concerns when a house is left empty. It will become vulnerable to criminal activity with an increased risk of defects not being identified and gardens becoming overgrown.

Those responsibilities which previously fell to the member of clergy living in the house will pass over to the sequestrators and parish.

This leaflet should provide the necessary information on the level of care and security of a vacant house and explain what needs to get done.

What does a Parish need to do?

The Churchwardens and Area Dean will be the appointed Sequestrators during a vacancy or interregnum. The Bishop may have appointed other sequestrators but this is unusual. They will need to ensure certain duties are undertaken and are often the point of contact for parish matters.

These are the principle areas of responsibility when a house is **EMPTY** :



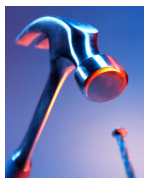
Expense

All the payments that a parish had to previously spend on the house will continue during a vacancy. You will be able to stop paying Council Tax if you contact the local authority and explain that the dwelling is held vacant for a 'Minister of Religion' and therefore exempt under 'The Council Tax (Exempt dwellings) Order 1992'. The PCC will need to pay for any standing charges for the utilities and as such it is advisable to take meter readings to avoid any confusion over charges. If the house is let meter readings will be taken by the new tenant and all future costs will be their responsibility.

When the house becomes vacant you will need to make arrangements for the telephone line, the procedure is as follows:

- Contact BT (or other company) on 0800 800 150 to make arrangements for their 'Caller Redirect' service. Caller redirect will allow calls to be redirected to someone else in the parish e.g churchwarden or parish office.
- This arrangement will cost the parish approximately £10 per month. BT offer a 3, 6 or 12 month contract and you will need to decide what your preferred option is. Most parishes agree a 3 month contract and renew when needed.
- If the house is let the tenant will have the use of the line but require a different telephone number. The tenant will be charged for the standard line rental and calls.
- When the house is reoccupied by a member of clergy you will need to cancel the 'Caller Redirect' service and BT will provide a stop order reference.

Please contact your Archdeacon should you experience difficulties in meeting your sequestration role regarding these costs.



Maintenance

Please contact the Houses Department for any items needing repair that you are aware of during the vacancy. The same level of maintenance will be undertaken by the Houses & Glebe Committee regardless of the fact that the property will be empty. Further information on the responsibilities for repair is outlined in the 'Houses Handbook' which is issued to all clergy who are offered a home.

If any repairs are required outside of office hours please arrange for a contractor to do the necessary work if it is considered to be an emergency. Any invoices for such work will be paid or a (PCC reimbursed) within 14 days of receipt.

Services

Please keep the central heating at a low level during autumn and winter as this will reduce the risk of faults occurring in the system and the likelihood of condensation and damp problems. Anti-freeze will have been added to the central heating system and therefore there should be no risk of burst pipes. The supply for the domestic water should be turned off and the system drained down by the parish. This can be carried out by simply turning off the stop cock, flushing WCs and leaving taps open.

Gardening

It will be necessary for the parish to maintain the garden areas to avoid them becoming unmanageable for the next clergy family. If the garden is kept tidy it helps the relationship with the neighbours and prevents the house from appearing empty. Furthermore, the house will look more welcoming for prospective clergy who may wish to look around the house before accepting the post. If the gardening work cannot be undertaken during any period please contact your Archdeacon for assistance.



Protection

Any house which is left empty will be vulnerable to vandalism, break-ins and arson. Regular visits to the house by members of the parish are essential in reducing the risks and in maintaining security. There are a number of measures which should be adopted which will reduce the risk of incidents occurring:

Post

Please prevent post building up as this is an obvious sign that the house is empty. There is likely to be correspondence received at the house relating to the parish which otherwise would be missed.

Lighting

Most houses will have external security lighting around the perimeter of the property. It is essential that the power is left on at all times to ensure the lights operate. It is advisable that the parish place a couple of lamps on timer switches in the house as a further deterrent for intruders.

Alarm and Keys

Every house will have an intruder alarm installed which should be switched on when the house is empty. A code will be provided allowing you to disable the alarm when visiting. Again, it is essential that the electricity supply is maintained to enable the alarm to work; the battery pack will only have a very short life expectancy.

A set of keys will be provided. If there are any keys which are missing or become lost during the vacancy please let the Houses Department know as soon as possible.

Curtains

If there are any missing curtains we ask that the parish provide replacements. The curtains are not for anyone moving in but prevent the house looking empty. Second hand curtains from charity shops are ideal for this purpose (they don't have to fit perfectly or have to be good quality) as they are a temporary measure.



Tenancy

In most circumstances a tenant will be sought to occupy the house for a short period. The arrangement will be under a six month Assured Shorthold Tenancy. There are a number of benefits in having the house let during the vacancy. It transfers many of the parish responsibilities and provides an income which is used to support the work of the diocese and thus reduce the overall parish share. The council tax, water rates and utility costs will be borne by the tenant.

The vacancy period during an interregnum is normally a minimum of nine months. It takes time to appoint a successor - completing parish profiles, advertising, interviews, checks with the Criminal Records Bureau, etc. A six month let still provides plenty of time to carry out any necessary repairs; whilst also allowing at least one month for a clergy family to move in and become settled before any licence date.

If the property is a parsonage and it has been identified by the Bishop that it should be let then the consent of the sequestrators is required. A form will be issued by the Houses & Glebe Committee which will need to be signed and returned



Your Belongings

Some clergy are happy for a parish to store their furniture and equipment in the vicarage house, garage, etc. It is important that any successor does not feel pressured into inheriting the same arrangement. Consequently, when the house becomes vacant all parish items will need to be removed and stored elsewhere.

It is understood that lawnmowers and gardening equipment has to be stored in the garage/shed to enable the parish to manage the grounds during the vacancy.

Thanks

Thank you for your co-operation, hard work and time in undertaking these duties which are invaluable for the care and protection of the house.

If there are any concerns or queries please contact the Houses Department below for further information. Although we are unable to fulfil every wish we will endeavour to provide as much support and help as possible.

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