

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'

October 2011



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. **If you are uncertain or have any questions please contact the Archdeacon or the Houses Department who will be happy to help.**

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 **E.M.P.T.Y:**



Expense

The PCC will still continue to be responsible for costs during the vacancy and will need to make sure that water rates, electricity, gas/LPG or oil and telephone line rental is paid for. Such costs can be discharged to the sequestration account. Information on expenditure (and income) during a vacancy can be found in the 'What to do during a vacancy leaflet' provided by the Archdeacon.

If the house is to be let then meter readings will be taken by the new tenant and the letting agent and all future costs will be their responsibility.

Council Tax

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'.

Utilities

The electricity will need to be left on at all times so that the alarm remains operational and there is suitable lighting available.

If the vacancy commences during one of the autumn or winter months then the outgoing vicar will leave the heating on a low level. We will arrange for a heating engineer to visit the property to fully drain down the system to avoid the risk of any burst pipes and consequential damage.

For those properties which are heated by oil it is essential that there is sufficient fuel in the tank to prevent considerable damage to the boiler occurring. It may be necessary for the PCC to make a purchase of oil to avoid such damage.

The next vicar will be able to reimburse you for this cost or, as some parishes do, it is given to them as a gift. Please monitor the oil in the tank to confirm that no thefts have taken place.

Telephone

It is essential that you liaise with the vicar regarding the telephone line. There is a risk in organising matters independently that the vicarage telephone number will be lost thereby creating a number of problems for the PCC and the next vicar.

The process for redirecting the telephone line will need to be undertaken by the account holder. It is advisable to avoid setting up a caller divert service as BT cannot guarantee the number will be retained. The recommended procedure is to implement a 'Business Call Redirection' service as outlined below.

- contact BT (or other company) on 0800 800 150 to make arrangements for their 'Business Call Redirection' service
- Call Redirection allows a message to be put on a messaging service asking the caller to call a different number to someone else in the parish e.g churchwarden or parish office
- This arrangement will cost the parish approximately £36 per quarter
- If the house is to be let the tenant will have to use a mobile telephone or they will have to have a new line installed
- When the house is reoccupied by a member of clergy you will need to cancel the 'Business Call Redirection' service and have the installation re connected whereupon a fee will be chargeable



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 should be sent to Church House; alternatively we can arrange reimbursement for any minor expenditure.

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 to the Area Dean 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 the next vicar 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 sometimes lawnmowers and gardening equipment may need 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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