

CARLISLE DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE

PROPERTY DEPARTMENT



Management of Benefice Houses During a Vacancy

Introduction

This document is intended to set out advice for churchwardens and outgoing clergy on the arrangements within the diocese for management of a benefice house in the lead up to, and during, a vacancy.

During a vacancy the churchwardens and the Rural Dean (or team vicars in a team ministry) become the sequestrators for the property. The responsibility for general maintenance and repair of the property that normally falls to the diocese under the Repair of Benefice Buildings Measure 1972 is unaffected by the vacancy. However, the responsibilities for the day to day care, security and condition of the property, which are normally the responsibility of an incumbent, pass to the sequestrators.

The diocese aims to assist the sequestrators and to directly adopt the responsibility for administering as much as possible of the sequestration process, with some assistance from the churchwardens.

Approaching a Vacancy

In the lead up to the vacancy the outgoing clergy are issued with a house vacation form by the Property Department. This form should be returned with information such as details of key holders, alarm codes and final meter readings for services.

Outgoing clergy have a responsibility when vacating a parsonage to ensure that it is left in a clean and tidy condition and that all contents are removed (including from lofts, garages and outbuildings).

Departing clergy should consider where any confidential documents are to be removed to and discuss this with the rural dean if necessary.

A meeting will be arranged with the outgoing clergy and rural dean or archdeacon. The property manager will attend where possible. The churchwardens will be invited to attend.

Prior to the vacancy the churchwardens should:

- Make arrangements for the handover of keys to the designated key holder(s).
- If the parish wish to retain the existing telephone number, make arrangements for the line to be transferred to the name of the PCC. We suggest that this may be done in the name of an individual, in order to avoid commercial line charges.

A cease order should not be placed on a telephone line if the number is to be retained. Once a line is disconnected it may not be possible to recover the previous telephone number.

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Upon Vacancy

Immediately upon the house being vacated the churchwardens should ensure that:

- All locks, bolts and other protective devices on doors and windows have been left in operation and that any intruder alarm has been left set.
- During the heating season (October to March inclusive) that the heating has been left running 24 hours a day at a temperature of 8°C unless the Property Department advises that arrangements are being made to drain the water systems down. (This is an insurance requirement.)
- Electricity, gas and water meter readings are taken and reported to the Property Department.
- Arrangements are made for any parish items, equipment and documents to be removed from the property.

While the Property is Vacant

While the house is unoccupied the churchwardens should ensure that:

- Internal and external inspections are carried out on the property at least twice a week. (This is an insurance requirement.)
- During the heating season that checks are made to ensure that the heating is still running and that any shortage of heating oil is reported to the Property Department.
- Any items of damage, disrepair or concern are reported to the Property Department for further action. Please note that the diocese will not meet the cost of any work carried out without prior authorisation.
- The garden is maintained with the lawns cut and the borders kept tidy. Where this proves a difficulty then some financial assistance may be available upon application to the Property Department.
- Junk mail is disposed of, mail for the previous occupant is forwarded on and any other correspondence relating to the property is sent to the Property Department.

Financial Matters

During the vacancy the diocese is prepared to undertake the administration of the sequestration account. The diocese will:

- Continue to liaise with the local authority over council tax. (A vacant and unfurnished benefice house held for clergy use is exempt from council tax payments.)
- Continue to liaise with United Utilities and meet the cost of any water rates. (A vacant and unfurnished benefice house held for clergy use is exempt from water rates.)
- Transfer gas and electricity accounts over to the diocese and meet any standing charges and the cost for energy consumed.
- Arrange for the provision of any heating oil required by the property.
- Generally to manage the payment of bills and accounts and to continue to maintain and repair the property.

Should you consider that any works or expenditure are required to the benefice house during a vacancy then please contact the Property Department.

Letting of Benefice Houses

It is the policy of the diocese to arrange for the letting of benefice houses during a vacancy where this will be of a sufficient duration for it to be viable. This brings a number of benefits. The letting brings valuable income to fund the work of the diocese. Having the house occupied reduces the risk of vandalism and other dangers associated with empty property. It also reduces the burden on the churchwardens during the vacancy.

Where the diocese is administering the sequestration account then it will be implied that the sequestrators agree to the Property Department, with the consent of the bishop and when instructed by the Board of Finance, letting out the vacant benefice house in their name and as their agent.

The Property Department will make the arrangements for marketing and letting the house and managing the tenancy.

Where there is a telephone number associated with the property which the parish wish to retain then, when the property is to be let, the Property Department will arrange for the number to be retained during the tenancy and diverted to a recorded message. The number will be transferred back to the property after the tenancy. The diocese will bear the cost of the diverting the line and maintaining the number during the tenancy.

Contact Details

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the management of a vacancy then please contact the Property Department:

Property Department
Church House
West Walls
Carlisle
CA3 8UE

Tel: 01228 815 403
In emergency: 07584 684 298

Email: property@carlisediocese.org.uk