



**A Guide to the Upkeep of Houses 2023**  
**Diocese of Durham**

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of the “Handbook” is to be a point of reference for our occupiers regarding the upkeep and care of Parsonage Houses and other Diocesan owned properties in the Diocese of Durham. (The Diocese is responsible for the housing of most clergy and licensed lay workers of the Diocese, whether the house in question is a benefice, glebe or corporate property)

Within this handbook is a statement of the current policies and guidelines on a range of issues, arranged alphabetically by topic for ease of use. In setting out the expectations which the Diocese has of occupiers/parishes, and the expectations occupiers/parishes can have of the Diocese, it is hoped that responsibilities become clearer. In the context of the partnership of care which exists (between the Diocesan Houses Department, the occupier and, where applicable, the parish) this clarity of responsibilities can only serve to aid better understanding and encourage and improve communication between us as partners.

Should you have any query or concern in relation to a Housing issue, in the first instance please contact the Houses Department at the Diocesan Office. We are here to help and happy to do so.

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**OUT OF OFFICE HOURS**  
**EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

**Gas Leak:** (24 hour service) Freephone 0800 111 999

**Heating Installation:** No Heating and Hot Water, ***this is only an emergency if a secondary source of heat*** is not provided i.e. gas/electric fire

- PHN Plumbing and Heating 07450262610 (Try these in the first instance)
- J & A Moody Boiler Maintenance Ltd 01207 503291

**Break – In/ Vandalism:**

Contact local police station who will be able to arrange a joiner/glazier to carry out emergency boarding up or repair or any local reputable contractor may be contacted.

- David Jackson – 07916 198710

**Burst Pipes:**

In the event of a burst pipe turn off the water at the mains, Contact a reputable plumber.

- PHN Plumbing and Heating 07450262610 (Try these in the first instance)
- J & A Moody Boiler Maintenance Ltd 01207 503291

**Broken Locks:**

Any local reputable contractor/locksmith, and then notify the diocese the next working day.

- David Jackson – 07916 198710

## SOME USEFUL ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS

### Archdeacons

**The Archdeacon of Auckland:** The Venerable Rick Simpson, Email:  
[Archdeacon.of.Auckland@durham.anglican.org](mailto:Archdeacon.of.Auckland@durham.anglican.org)

**The Archdeacon of Sunderland:** Email:  
[Archdeacon.of.Sunderland@durham.anglican.org](mailto:Archdeacon.of.Sunderland@durham.anglican.org)

**The Archdeacon of Durham:** Email:  
[Archdeacon.of.Durham@durham.anglican.org](mailto:Archdeacon.of.Durham@durham.anglican.org)

**Cuthbert House, Stonebridge, Durham. DH1 3RY. Tel: 01388 604515**

***The following guidance has been prepared to answer some of the typical questions from clergy and occupiers of diocesan houses regarding their homes and covers the most common housing issues.***

**Accidental Damage:** Damage caused to the property by the occupants and other guests: Where accidental damage occurs, the Diocese will effect repair and may wish to claim against the Ecclesiastical Insurance Group policy. However, the occupier will be liable for the policy excess – currently £200. The cost of any repair less than £200 will be borne locally, i.e. by the occupier.

**Alterations:** Under the Repair of Benefice Buildings Measure 1972 **NO** additions or alterations may be made to a parsonage, or any other diocesan owned property, without the express prior written consent of the diocese. This includes permission for the provision of ceramic tiling, artex and/or other textured finishes and boarding out of lofts for storage.

**Artex: Existing and Textured Finishes:** Do not attempt to remove, sand or drill into Artex or other textured finishes. These can contain asbestos, and the Diocese must be notified if anything other than normal redecoration to these areas is planned or carried out.

**Asbestos** - All houses built prior to 2000 could contain asbestos materials in a variety of guises. Most asbestos material is generally harmless when intact and in good condition and therefore should not be disturbed. The issue is when this becomes friable and fragments can become airborne. If an occupier suspects there is an asbestos element this should be avoided and reported to the diocesan office immediately. Any suspected material is to be treated as asbestos and therefore undisturbed until proved otherwise.

**See also: Decorations: internal**

**Bathrooms:** The Diocese may choose to improve bathrooms. Normally consideration is only given to this as vacancies occur, at the time of quinquennial inspection, or when it is recommended to do so by the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities. Every home should be equipped with a shower. Where these are fitted over a bath, it is advisable to check seals around the bath and shower trays on a regular basis and ensure shower curtains operate correctly and are kept inside the bath/shower tray to avoid spillage.

**Bats:** On occasions bats may roost within the roof space of vicarages, garages or outbuildings. Under current legislation they should not be disturbed and measures may need to be put in place for their protection. If any repairs are needed within the roof space, it will be necessary for Natural England to visit the property and identify the species of bat. Natural England has the power to prevent the repair going ahead if the works are likely to disturb the bats. In most circumstances a compromise will be reached.

**Batteries:** There may be parts of installations in the property which require batteries occasionally to maintain their function. The cost of all batteries to be met by the occupier. These will include: alarm key fobs; garage door key fobs; wireless PIR

sensors for intruder alarms; smoke alarms. **The cost of new batteries for these items may be claimed through the heating, lighting and cleaning expenses account.**

**Boilers:** The Diocese has in place arrangements for the annual servicing and maintenance of all gas fired boilers and annual servicing of oil fired boilers. This is a statutory requirement and as custodian, occupants **MUST** make every effort to afford the contractor access. If servicing has not taken place as intended, or is not satisfactory, the Houses Department should be advised as soon as possible to implement further measures.

**It is essential that any room ventilators within a room are not obstructed.**

**Book shelving:** The Diocese normally provides approximately 27m of book shelving to parsonage studies. Shelving is not provided for curates' houses.

**Carpets** – see Floor Coverings

**Cat-flaps:** Prior to having a cat flap fitted please speak with the housing department who will be able to inform you if the door is under warranty. If the door is under warranty the request will be refused as this will void the warranty. Any personal losses incurred due to break-in via such door will be met by the occupier and we would strongly recommend you contact your insurer to let them know you have fitted a cat flap

**Please ensure you seek the housing department's advice before fitting a cat flap**

On vacating the property you will be responsible for the reinstatement of the door if the incoming tenant asks for the cat flap to be removed

**Charges for Contractors:** When a contractor visits a property by previous appointment with the occupier, and the occupier is not able to keep the appointment, every attempt must be made by them to contact the contractor or the diocesan office. Any costs accrued are the responsibility of the occupier.

**Chimneys and Flues:** The regular sweeping of chimneys used for open fires, or for any solid fuel burning stove, is essential as **blocked chimneys or flues can be fatal**. Chimney fires can cause great damage to the house and unnecessary inconvenience to the occupiers. The Diocese will only arrange and pay for all chimneys and flues to be swept during quinquennial works. It is the occupier's responsibility to arrange **annual** sweeping of chimneys and flues, with the cost to be met locally. Failure to do this may compromise the diocesan buildings insurance.

**Cookers:** These are not provided by the Diocese, unless they are integrated. Their provision and installation is the responsibility of the occupier. Free-standing cookers are recommended so that they can be easily installed and removed at the time of moving house. The Diocese will provide a standard space of approx. 620mm. It is a statutory requirement that a cooker chain be fitted to any eye level grill type free-standing cookers. The arranging and cost of installation, connection service/maintenance is the responsibility of the occupier. The diocesan contractor

will inspect cookers as part of the annual gas service, but all costs of any repairs identified or service will be the responsibility of the occupier. Requests for larger spaces to accommodate non-standard cookers will be considered where an occupier meets all costs of the works and reinstatement when vacating.

**Built in Cookers and Hobs** – These generally occur where a house has been bought in. The diocese will generally maintain until repair or replacement of the cooker or the kitchen but reserve the right to remove and provide a space for a traditional free standing cooker at any time.

**Cookers - Gas fired:** These will be inspected for compliance with Safety Regulations at the time of the annual gas test. This is free of charge to occupiers. If faults are identified by the diocesan retained engineer, the occupier will be responsible for meeting all costs incurred for the fault identification, and if appropriate, rectification. The Diocese regrets it cannot assist with the cost of repairing or replacing cookers which are the responsibility of the occupier.

**Cookers - Agas:** These are serviced annually by a nominated contractor. The Diocese will meet the reasonable cost of servicing and maintenance but reserves the option of removing and not replacing the cooker boiler in the event of major expense being likely. The cost of removal will be met by the Diocese. However, the occupier will need to supply their own cooker.

**Consequential redecoration:** This will vary from case to case and must be assessed by the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities who will then decide on what percentage of decoration, **if any**, should be carried out. Where damage occurs to a room, the Diocese will consider decoration to the affected areas only and not whole rooms, similar to that as prescribed under insurance guidance.

**Council Tax:** Normally, council tax in respect of the occupation of the parsonage house by a minister of religion is paid by the Diocese. **Occupiers should refer correspondence regarding council tax to the Diocesan Office without delay.** Council tax may not be due when a house is temporarily unoccupied pending reoccupation by a minister of religion. When occupation is shared with **lodgers or persons over the age of 18**, the Diocesan Office should be informed as this can alter the amount of council tax which is payable. When houses are let, tenants are responsible for council tax.

**Curtain tracks/poles:** These are the responsibility of the occupier.

**Decorations: External:** The Diocese will arrange for the external decoration of the house including its outbuildings, fences etc. to be painted, stained or treated with preservative as appropriate, as part of the quinquennial works. **Shrubs should be removed or pinned back by the occupier for access prior to painting where feasible.**

**Decorations: Internal:** The Diocese will provide houses in good decorative order after which occupants are responsible for all internal redecoration of their homes. The Diocese expects internal decorations to be kept to a reasonably good standard

and would advocate as a reasonable guide these should be decorated approx. every 4th year. If work is carried out by parish or other volunteers, care should be taken to ensure that they work safely, within their capabilities and to an acceptable standard. It is preferable, and the Diocese requests, that all decorations, especially woodwork, be kept to neutral colours, and maintained on a regular basis.

**Disabled Access/Adaptation:** The Diocese ensures that a house is provided as a home for an incumbent and their family. Many clergy decide to utilise their home for meetings or other events, but this is **strictly at their own discretion**. Consequently, compliance to section 21 of The Disability Discrimination Act 1996 (DDA) is the duty of the service provider i.e. the incumbent. If an incumbent/occupant, or a dependant and immediate family member (partner or child) who is living in the house, is, or becomes disabled. The incumbent/occupant should seek guidance and Grant aid from Social Services and provide evidence in support of their disability and any grant funding for which the Diocese will provide necessary confirmation for such to proceed. The Diocese may contribute towards and on occasion undertake necessary adaptation works in consultation with Social Services and, if necessary, Occupational Therapists.

**Doorbells:** These will be installed on a request basis and repaired or replaced by the Diocese.

**Drains:** The Diocese is responsible for the clearing and repair of blocked drains. It is the responsibility of the occupier to ensure that no unsuitable items are disposed of via sinks, wash hand basins, showers, baths or WCs, and that pipe work to internal sinks and showers are cleaned to prevent blockages. If the cause of the blockage is found to be misuse e.g. large amounts of cooking fat, hair, sanitary towels, face wipes, baby wipes etc., the cost of clearing will be rechargeable to the occupier. The cost of any structural damage caused by tree roots, collapsed drains etc., will be met by the Diocese.

**Driveways and Paths:** Occupiers **are responsible for keeping** all paved areas in good condition free from weeds and moss and drains kept clear of earth, leaves and other obstructions. Any deterioration of the surface should be reported to the Houses Department. "Armillatox", a standard proprietary cleaner is available from garden centres and hardware stores and can be used for cleaning paths of slime and moss growth. It is environmentally friendly and safe for pets and can be purchased from most hardware stores.

**Electrical Installations and Testing:** Testing will be carried out at or before each quinquennial inspection by NICEIC approved contractors appointed by the Diocese. Any upgrades identified and authorised by the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities such as additional socket outlets etc., will be carried out at this time. If, between inspections or while work is being carried out, occupiers have any worries regarding the electrical installation they should contact the Houses Department as soon as possible.

**Adapters:** It is advisable to use adapters only as a temporary connection and only if this has an integral fuse.

**Call outs and Faults:** Where testing or upgrade identifies faults with an occupiers' own appliances, the occupier will be responsible for meeting all costs incurred for

fault identification and, if appropriate, rectification. Likewise, if an occupant requests a call out and the electrician identifies the occupiers' own appliances are the cause the occupier will be responsible for meeting all costs incurred for attendance, fault identification and, as appropriate, rectification.

**Environmental Issues:** All cavity walls are to be insulated where this is possible. All the main lofts are insulated with a minimum of 150mm glass fibre roll quilt, and more recently up to 270mm. The Diocese continues to seek ways to improve the energy efficiency and environmental impact of repairs and improvements to the houses in its care. The Durham Diocese has worked closely with other dioceses both regionally and nationally to promote and develop environmental policies to embrace its whole operation.

**External Taps:** These will be provided upon written request to the Houses Department but would usually be supplied at QI or other works. Occupiers must ensure that external taps are turned off during the winter months to avoid burst pipes. They are best insulated and within a small box if possible not provided by the diocese.

**Fences:** When work is required to boundary fences, walls etc., the Houses Department must be consulted first. Responsibility may be with the owner on either side, or it may be shared between them. The Houses Department will check this. If responsibility is with the parsonage, or partly with the parsonage, then the Diocese will meet the cost or its share of the cost. **It is, however, asked that minor repairs to wooden fences be carried out by the occupier and that they be kept free from becoming overgrown with vegetation.**

***The Diocese cannot be responsible for providing 'pet-proof' boundaries. It will be the sole responsibility of the pet owner/occupier to undertake whatever work is necessary to prevent the loss or escape of their pets.*** They should seek written authorisation from the diocese prior to commencing any work to boundary fences.

**Fires: Gas:** The testing of gas fires will be carried out annually to **all** gas fires (regardless of where they are sited and provided they belong to the house) at the time of boiler servicing. Where a gas fire is found to be inadequate or unsafe:

- a) to any room other than the main reception room (lounge) it will be removed and **NOT** replaced;
- b) to the study it will be replaced with an electric slim line wall mounted convector heater. In some cases an electric fire could be fitted to an existing fireplace at the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities discretion;
- c) to the lounge (main reception room) it will be replaced by the Diocese.

**Fire surrounds:** If an occupier wishes to change the surround, written agreement on the design must be obtained from the Diocese. The cost of this work will be met by the occupier. Where the Diocese decides to change the fire surround usually at time of QI or other works, the Diocese will meet the cost. **Do not paint fireplace surrounds.**

**Fires - Wood Burning Stoves** – Should an occupant wish to install a wood burning stove or similar type appliance they should seek written approval from the diocese prior to commencement. The occupier will be responsible in ensuring that a

reputable contractor is used and that any chimneys and flues are suitable for purpose. Upon occasion there may be issues with a certain flue or chimney and costs to repair may be required prior to such an appliance being fitted. The diocese will take a view on this matter and reserves the right to decline the installation based upon the associated costs involved. If the occupant wishes to still proceed and cover such repair costs the diocese will normally agree.

**Fixtures and Fittings:** Normally fixtures and fittings are defined as permanent parts of the house, while all loose and free-standing items are the personal property of the occupier. Sometimes confusion can arise when occupiers fix some of their own property to the house and then wish to remove it when they vacate. This practice is accepted on the understanding that the occupier concerned **will make good any damage caused by the fixing and subsequent removal at their own expense.**

Occupier's own fixtures, fittings or appliances should be covered under their own house contents policy which must cover damage to the fabric of the house.

Where occupiers install their own light fittings, the existing ones, or a suitable replacement, must be reinstated on leaving. Recent changes to building regulations require that when light fittings are replaced within a bathroom or kitchen, a specific type is required and should be installed by a qualified contractor.

The Diocese will not usually purchase any fixtures or fittings left by an outgoing occupier. Any changes to the fabric, fixtures or fittings of a house e.g. removal of plaster mouldings etc., should not be carried out by occupiers without written agreement from the Diocese has been obtained. Failure to comply could lead to an occupier being charged for the making good costs associated with correcting such matters.

**Floor Finishes: - Habitable Rooms (default will be carpet)**

Replaced/provided (with hard wearing medium grade neutral colours) as necessary or if bold and or dated colouring/patterning.

*Carpets* - The Diocese may provide carpets to a house and this will usually take place at vacancy, this will be at the discretion of the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities. They are a fixture of the property and owned by the Diocese. Existing carpets which are considered to be in 'good order' will be retained.

There is a 'Standard of Replacement Carpet' (which may vary from time to time) and will be provided where an occupier is unknown. Where occupiers are known, a selection of pastel colour choices from the same range may be considered if requested.

Occupants wishing to change carpets for personal choice or for laminate will be required to seek prior written approval from the diocese. If permission is granted, carpets must be suitable for retention afterwards or the occupier will be required to retain, store and refit the standard carpet on their departure. Any bold colours or Laminates will need to be replaced at their departure to comply with current diocesan policy.

In rare instances where pet soiling is particularly bad Floorboards may be professionally cleaned to eliminate any pet odours as necessary.

*Parquet* type (wood tiles or wood strips) may be retained only where it remains serviceable and it will, in general, be carpeted over. **Laminate** flooring will not be provided by the diocese but may be left in-situ if in good order.



Wet areas – *Vinyl* flooring: The Diocese will provide flooring to these areas as and when determined necessary by the Surveyor. Where works are required to wet areas which damages or affects an alternative floor covering provided by an occupier, the occupier will be responsible for reinstatement/repair or replacement costs. The Diocese provides vinyl floor covering in kitchens, utility rooms, cloakrooms and bathrooms. The diocese has a standard selection from which to choose. If an occupant wishes to have a different floor covering design the diocese may consider this at the occupiers cost.

*Ceramic Floor Tiling:* The diocese does not provide nor recommend the fitting of such floor coverings over existing timber floors as it can prevent the floor from breathing and makes access to underfloor services difficult. This should not be fitted without written consent from the Diocese. Where it is in place and a section is required to be removed for access or replacement of items belonging to the Diocese, the cost of reinstatement of the coverings will be the occupier's responsibility. However the diocese reserves the right to remove it completely at their discretion. If an occupier wishes to retain *Existing Parquet flooring.* The Diocese may re-fix the Parquet flooring to floor substrate but the costs of sanding, sealing and colouring is the occupier's responsibility. Occupiers must not remove or physically adhere any coverings to floors without first receiving authority from the Houses Department.

**Garage doors:** The repair of garage doors is the responsibility of the Diocese. (Accidental damage will be the responsibility of the occupier). If renewal is necessary, the door will be replaced by the Diocese with a standard door. It is not diocesan policy to fit electrically operated garage doors. Where these already exist, repair and maintenance will be diocesan responsibility. However, the Diocese retains the right to revert back to a mechanical rather than electrically operated door on grounds of cost. Replacement batteries for remote controls are the responsibility of the occupier. Occupiers are asked to spray the garage door mechanical components with WD40 on an annual basis.

**Gardens: Gardens and hedges are the responsibility of the occupier and should be kept in good order by the occupier at all times. It is advisable that hedges and particularly any climbing shrubs are maintained to a manageable size no higher than 2m.**

*Police Crime Prevention Officers advise that tidier gardens with lower or no hedges discourages interest from unwanted quarters.*

***During a vacancy, the diocese will cut the grass fortnightly where a parish cannot and will reduce hedges and any climbers to an acceptable height. There are certain tax concessions available to clergy for expenditure on garden maintenance. The appropriate form is sent to clergy each year in respect of this and is combined with the form for tax allowance on heating, lighting and cleaning of their parsonage house. Further information can be obtained from the Diocesan Finance Department.***

**Garden Ponds:** The Diocese does not provide garden ponds and does not accept any responsibility for removal or maintenance. It is a decision of the occupier whether or not they wish to continue to maintain or remove garden ponds.

**The Diocese strongly advises against the installation of garden ponds on grounds of health and safety.**

**Gas Installation:** The Diocese has in place arrangements for annual testing of the gas installation including all appliances in the house. The testing will usually coincide with the servicing of any gas fired boiler. Work to the gas installation and to gas appliances may only be carried out by registered contractors. This is both Diocesan policy and a statutory requirement. The occupier must afford access to the contractor. Where a contractor visits a property by appointment made with the occupier and the occupier is not in, the charge for the visit will be the responsibility of the occupier. Cost of servicing/maintenance of boilers is the responsibility of the Diocese.

**Gas Leak:** If there is suspicion of a gas leak the following procedure should be followed:

1. Extinguish all naked flames. Do not switch on or off any electric lights or appliances, the spark in the switch can cause an explosion.
2. If possible turn off the gas supply at the mains. This is usually next to the meter itself.
3. Ensure good ventilation by opening doors and windows wide.
4. Contact the Gas Emergencies – **Freephone 0800 111 999** (24 hour service), who will normally disconnect the supply until others have resolved the problem, or carry out the work free of charge.
5. During office hours this will involve telephoning the Houses Department at the Diocesan Office. At other times help should be sought from the contractor engaged to service the boiler and testing the gas installation. If this is not possible, then assistance may be sought from any registered contractor or, in the last resort, from the Gas Board.

**Glazing:** In the event of a broken window during office hours, the occupier should contact the Houses Department. Out of office hours please contact one of the contractors listed at the start of this handbook, or any other reputable local contractor.

If damage has occurred as the result of vandalism or break-in, the police should be contacted. The police may be able to organise emergency boarding up. Occupiers should keep a record of the date/time of any incident and the crime number provided by the Police. Windows should only be replaced with toughened glass if there is a problem with repeated vandalism/break-in or on grounds of safety (i.e. in or adjacent to a door at low level). Accidental damage is the responsibility of the occupier.

**Green Guide:** The Church Commissioners publish a book on parsonage ideals and good practice, commonly known as "*The Green Guide*". The Diocese works with the guide but the existing diocesan housing stock is diverse and it is not realistic (nor a requirement) for parsonages to comply with the latest edition of *The Green Guide*.

**Greenhouses; Garden Sheds:** The Diocese does not provide greenhouses or garden sheds and accepts no responsibility for their maintenance. It is a decision by the occupier whether or not they wish to continue to maintain or remove these buildings at the start of their occupation.

**Gutter clearance etc.:** All gutters, hoppers, down pipes, gullies and drains should be inspected and cleaned of debris on an annual basis. It is the responsibility of the occupier to ensure that appropriate arrangements are

**made for this to be carried out.** The work should be carried out safely by competent persons experienced in ladder use. If a local contractor is not known the Houses Department will be able to recommend a contractor. During a quinquennial inspection clearing of gutters etc., will be carried out by the Diocese as part of the quinquennial works. Blocked gutters etc. can cause penetrating dampness which can have a dramatic effect on the deterioration of the internal finishes and timberwork, even leading to dry rot.

**Heating, Fires and Radiators:** The Diocese provides all houses in its care with full central heating plus an independent heat source in the lounge and study. This could be an electric convector heater in the study. The lounge fire can be any fuel source. Where an occupier wishes to change a particular fire, i.e. from gas to an open fire, written permission must be received from the Diocese, all costs of the conversion will be met by the occupier.

At present some houses have immersion heaters. As the Diocese is continually renewing traditional boilers with condensing boilers, immersion heaters are being discarded. Where there is an additional heat source to another room (dining room) this will be maintained through its life. However, if this is found to be defective or obsolete the Diocese will disconnect and remove the appliance without replacement. Radiators do not burn gas, therefore, turning radiators off will not save money. In fact it will probably increase fuel costs as this creates cold spots and draughts in the house because cold air is heavier than warm air.

When **bleeding radiators**, make sure the central heating is in the "off" position, place your bleed key on the bleed nipple (this will be at the top, at one side only and could even be at the back, but usually is at one end). Turn the bleed key ½ a turn anti-clockwise to shut it off (do not over tighten). If you have a sealed system then the pressure will probably need topping up to one bar. (If there is not a gauge on or near the boiler, then this instruction will not apply).

**Hedges: It is the responsibility of the occupier as part of their garden care to maintain all hedges at a manageable size and height.** This includes Lleylandii. **It is advisable that hedges are maintained to a height of approx. 2m.** During a vacancy the Diocese reserves the right to remove any hedges that it feels necessary particularly Leylandii, which can become a nuisance.

**House for Duty:** Repair and maintenance issues are dealt with by the Houses Department in the usual way. However, there may be differences to parish, occupiers and diocesan responsibilities and provisions regarding the house and its occupation. Please contact the Diocesan Secretary regarding agreement and guidelines.

**Improvement Works:** The Diocese may wish to make improvements to a property and will generally look to carry these works out at the time of QI or vacancy, e.g. bathroom, kitchen or window replacement. Generally, major works will be attended to at QI in accordance with programmed improvements or if funds are available these may be brought forward to a vacancy.

**Infestation:** i.e. bees, flies, wasps, mice, rats etc. The Houses Department should be notified of the problem. The diocese cannot accept responsibility for meeting any costs for such work. The diocese will however, bear the cost of removing any access and egress points used by rodents etc. as directed by the Local Authority pest control Officer.

**Ingoing Decoration Grants:** There are no grants available from the diocese for such purposes. The Diocese will attend to a level of redecoration as determined by the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities at a vacancy. Some parishes may operate a scheme on an annual basis for their clergy and this needs to be investigated locally.

**Insulation:** All lofts should be insulated. All lofts have fibreglass quilt insulation to a minimum depth of 150mm up to a maximum of 270mm.

**Insurance of Houses:** The Diocese insures the parsonages buildings together with their fixtures and fittings for standard risk **including third party claims**. Any damage or any claim for compensation should be reported immediately to the Houses Department who will be able to advise and who will, if appropriate, notify the insurers. For claims resulting from accidental damage the excess charge (currently £200) will be borne locally by those responsible. Household contents are the responsibility of the occupier. It is important that they make their own arrangements for the insurance of their personal possessions. TV aerials which are owned by the Diocese are insured under the house policy. Any receiving equipment (i.e. Sky dishes) owned by occupiers will need to be covered on their own house contents policy.

**The Diocese expects that all occupants will put in place adequate insurance cover for their own house contents.**

**Instructing to Contractors:** When contractors are working under the supervision of the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities, Houses Department, or some other appointed architect, surveyor or engineer, **clergy and PCC officers should not raise matters directly with contractors but address all concerns to the Houses Department to prevent the cost of un-authorized work being charged to the occupier or to the PCC.**

**Integral kitchen appliances:** Where these have been provided, normally in a “bought-in” house, because of the style of the kitchen, repairs and maintenance will be the responsibility of the Diocese. The Diocese reserves the right to remove these and replace with space only for a free-standing appliance and will normally do so upon total failure of an appliance. **The provision of the replacement cooker will be the responsibility of the occupier.**

**Internal Light Fittings:** The Diocese only provides pendant, batten and fluorescent light fittings. All others are the responsibility of the occupier regardless of whether or not they provided the ones there. Where light fittings are changed during occupancy, the original fitting, or a suitable replacement, must be reinstated before vacancy. Fluorescent lights: It is the responsibility of the occupier to supply and fit new tubes (bulbs) and starter motors in the event of failure.

**Intruder Alarm Systems:** Over recent years the Diocese has been engaged on a rolling programme to provide and maintain intruder alarms in the houses in its care. A grant is available to those occupiers/PCCs who continue to pay for alarm maintenance i.e. where alarms were fitted prior to the current policy, and they can seek reimbursement of up to £50 per annum by sending copy of the invoice to the Houses Department. The Diocese does not provide or maintain monitored systems (e.g. Redcare). Where alarms are serviced by the diocese, this will be carried out once every five years, in accordance with guidelines recommended by the Ecclesiastical Insurance Group. If you have any questions about the alarm maintenance system please contact the Houses Department. Upon vacancy, a churchwarden and the Houses Department should be informed of any code number. Please note that replacement batteries for remote controls and for wireless PIR sensors are the responsibility of the occupier.

**Invoices: Payment of:** Invoices for authorised work organised locally should be passed promptly to the Houses Department (within 28 days) with a note confirming that the work has been carried out satisfactorily together with clear written advice on who requires reimbursement e.g. contractor, PCC or occupier. Reimbursement will not be made retrospectively outside of the accounting period (year-end) and not greater than 28 days from the date of the invoice. Invoices outside this period may not be paid.

**Ivy:** It is often the case that shrubbery is encouraged close to, or even, against the house. The Diocese does not encourage this activity with any plants as it can create problems with dampness. It can also create problems when carrying out maintenance work. As a general rule the Diocese advises all occupants to avoid this, or where there are preferences for this, **it must be maintained by the occupier. It is recommended that these plants are not encouraged beyond 2m in height, beyond which DIY maintenance becomes difficult.** **Where such recommendations are ignored, the Diocese may remove it in order to prevent damage to the structure of the house, and recover the cost from the occupier.**

**Jacuzzi Baths:** These appliances may be fitted to houses that have been bought in and are not standard features. The diocese reserves the right to take out these appliances in exchange for a standard bath. Occupiers are responsible for ensuring that Jacuzzi (whirlpool) baths are cleaned and disinfected regularly in accordance with the manufacturers (and/or Diocesan) guidelines (information paper J).

**Japanese Knotweed** – see information paper

**Kitchens:** When necessary the Diocese will improve kitchens normally at the time of the quinquennial or if funds are available and the quinquennial is within 2 years it may be considered at vacancy. Do not paint existing kitchen or utility cupboard doors without prior written diocesan consent. (See information paper B – Care of Kitchen Units).

**Legionella** – The Legionella bacteria is naturally occurring and found in all temperate water sources. Occupiers should not be initially alarmed by this element

as the risks in a domestic situation are minimal owing to regular water turnover, normal usage in a general domestic situation of a house is generally more than sufficient to remove or maintain the risk at safe levels.

The risk is further lowered where combi boilers and electric showers are used as there is no water storage.

There are a few simple measures that the diocese recommends occupiers should take to further reduce the risk such as follows:

1. Run all taps and showers regularly to ensure it is fresh water in the pipes, focus on those less used such elements/areas such as en-suites, or bedroom wash hand basins for example. Running for 1 minute would generally be sufficient.
2. Clean and disinfect shower heads regularly
3. Ensure water stored in tanks/cylinders is at 60 degrees.
4. Jacuzzi baths must be chlorinated (disinfected) regularly.

**Letting:** It is diocesan policy that all housing subject to impending vacancy will be considered for letting. Having a property let during a vacancy maintains a degree of security and reduces both PCC and churchwardens responsibilities in caring for a vacant property. All tenancies will initially be six month assured short-hold. The Houses Department will contact PCCs/churchwardens this will normally be discussed at the outgoing inspection.

**Lettings and Lodgers:** The law governing the letting or leasing of a parsonage house or its grounds can be complex. Numerous approvals are required not least that of the Bishop and the Diocesan Registrar. If clergy or PCCs believe there are special circumstances which will make a tenancy or lease inappropriate they should, in the first instance, contact the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities for advice on procedures. Clergy may take in lodgers but it is advisable to inform and seek advice from the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities before doing so. Any rent received by an incumbent will need to be disclosed for tax purposes. It is also likely that Council Tax payments paid by the Diocese could change. Any increase in Council Tax would need to be reclaimed from the incumbent.

There are legal considerations that affect both the occupier and the diocese under such circumstances. At vacancy all lodgers must vacate with or before the incumbent.

**Listed Buildings:** Some houses are listed under the Historic Buildings Act 1962 as being of architectural or other interest and are required by law to be kept in good order. Alterations or major repairs, regardless of nature, may require planning permission and Historic Building consent. Listing of a property can relate to all items within the curtilage of the house including the boundary walls and any other garden structure. Occupiers of such buildings should be aware of this. This may also affect internal features or decorations i.e. listed wallpapers, cornices etc. Cat-flaps will not be permitted by conservation officers. It will also influence the type and extent of works that will be permitted, as preservation of original characteristics take precedence. If an occupier has any queries, please contact the Houses Department.

**Meter Readings:** This is important for their own protection. Upon vacation the Houses Department should be informed of the meter readings and of the gas and electric suppliers. **It is the outgoing occupier's responsibility to ensure that all**

**meters are read and gas and electricity accounts are transferred to the diocesan office.**

It is important that water services are maintained in the name of the Parochial Church Council. The Diocese will be responsible for the payment of any utility bills during a vacancy. If the house is to be let, responsibility for the payment of all utility bills will pass to the tenant from the date when the tenancy commences reverting back to the diocese when the tenancy terminates.

**Neglect of House and Garden:** Houses should be cared for and maintained in good condition by our occupants. Where properties are mistreated during occupation or left in a poor condition resulting in the Diocese having to divert finite resources, the Bishop reserves the right to have these houses reinstated to a level acceptable to the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities and all costs being recovered from the outgoing occupant in accordance with the Repair of Benefice Buildings Measure **(RBBM)** 1972 – Annex D Summary of Main Duties and Rights:

**Parochial Church Councils/Churchwardens:** PCCs and churchwardens are asked to assist their clergy in their care of the house where possible. Help with smaller jobs can be extremely valuable. During a vacancy the churchwardens will be expected to hold a set of keys locally to enable the house to be checked twice weekly, this being a requirement of diocesan insurers. A record of visitation dates and times should be maintained in case an event occurs.

**Pets:** Pets are the sole responsibility of occupiers regarding cleanliness, security and enclosure and must be house-trained. Houses should not be modified, for example by the fitting of cat-flaps without first receiving written approval from the Diocese. Occupiers who keep domestic pets will be held liable for any damage which arises as a consequence e.g. scratched doors or floor coverings. Occupiers will be liable to meet all costs of alteration and reinstatement before vacating. Pet related infestation (fleas) should and must be dealt with by the relevant owner of the particular pet. On vacating, any problems of infestation arising remain the outgoing occupier's responsibility. The Bishop reserves the right to recoup any costs incurred due to neglect.

**Repairs – General:** All repairs should be reported to the diocesan office in the first instance. The diocesan houses department are responsible for all repairs and are happy to help with all enquiries.

**Repairs – (DIY):** Care should be taken not to undertake any work which would put people at risk, or to embark on repairs which are beyond the capabilities of those undertaking the work. Please contact the Houses Department **before** any work is put in hand locally if you are uncertain. All costs associated in correcting DIY work by an occupier will be recovered from the occupier. Recent changes to building regulations require that when lights or other electrical fittings are replaced within a bathroom or kitchen, a specific type is required and should be installed by a qualified contractor and certification provided.

**Resettlement Grants:** Information on the payment of resettlement grants can be obtained from the P.A. to the Diocesan Secretary.

**Roofs:** Works to roofs are the responsibility of the Diocese. Roofs will be checked by a diocesan contractor at quinquennial inspection and sometimes during other inspections.

The occupier should visually inspect the roof from the ground annually. If a problem is thought to exist, please report this to the Houses Department immediately.

**Safety and Security:** This is a major issue and concerns everyone. It is widely acknowledged that clergy can be particularly vulnerable, often living in houses that are somewhat isolated and therefore more vulnerable than is the norm. The Diocese is addressing this issue by the ongoing process of upgrading security accessories to houses such as locks etc. to Approved British Standards. Security light timer switches will be fitted as part of the quinquennial works. The Diocese is, therefore, of the opinion that the installation of any item that may bridge or lessen the security of a property should be avoided. Cat/Dog-flaps unquestionably weaken doors. They are not necessarily of sufficient quality to prevent their removal quite easily. They may provide access points for intruders. Occupiers concerned about security are advised to contact the Houses Department who will be able to offer guidance. Local Crime Prevention Officers will also be able to give advice.

It is important that a clear field of vision is maintained around a property by ensuring that shrubs and hedges have a maximum growth height of 2m. Trees should not have branches below a height of 2m. It is accepted that this is flexible and to individual preferences.

**Security Lighting:** Externally, houses should be well lit for convenience and safety and to help with security. Each house is different and what is required will depend upon local circumstances, the position of the house, the closeness or otherwise of street lighting etc. Where necessary the Diocese will meet the cost of automatically operated external lights controlled with passive infra-red sensors.

**The cost of replacing and fitting security light bulbs will, however, be the occupant's responsibility.**

If a fitting is not working the Houses Department will arrange for a contractor to call. **However, should it only be the bulb which requires replacing, the whole of the electrician's costs will be met by the occupier.** Consideration to the installation of security lights will normally be given as vacancies occur or at the time of the quinquennial inspection.

Generally, the Diocese will look to provide one light fitting per elevation if and as required.

**Septic Tanks:** The Diocese will meet the cost of emptying septic tanks upon sight of invoice, it must be within the 28 days of completion and within the accounting period (year-end) arrangements for emptying tanks should be made locally. Reimbursement



will not be made retrospectively without sight of invoices and outside of the accounting period (year-end).

**Showers:** The standard minimum provision is an instantaneous electric shower either over the bath or in a self-contained cubicle but some houses, for various reasons, have other or additional arrangements. Another option is a Thermostatic bar type shower fed directly from the CH Boiler.

Curtains and shower doors must be properly positioned to avoid water spilling onto floors. All seals or tiling should be regularly checked by the occupier and any defects reported to the Houses Department early before significant water damage can occur. Minor repairs such as re-sealing can be undertaken locally.

All shower heads/hoses: Should be checked, cleaned and disinfected and kept free from lime scale on a regular basis weekly would be recommended. Replacement shower heads and flexible hoses is the responsibility of the occupier, and can be obtained from any local DIY store.

Power showers are not provided by the Diocese. If a house is purchased with a power shower already installed and it fails, the Diocese may decide to replace it with an electric or thermostatic bar shower. If an occupier wishes to install a power shower at their own expense this work can be done with prior written approval from the Diocese. Only economic repairs will be considered by the Diocese.

**Signs/Vicarage Nameplates:** If these are required, arrangement for supply and fitting should be made locally. A grant of up to £15 is available from the Houses Department on sight of invoices.

**Smoke Alarms:** Battery operated smoke alarms have all been replaced by the Diocese with hardwired smoke alarms at the time of the quinquennial inspection. Hardwired smoke alarms are fitted with a back-up battery and the testing and replacement of these batteries is the responsibility of the occupier.

**Stop taps: Occupiers should ensure that they and their families know the location of stop taps so that in the event of an emergency (i.e. burst pipes) water can be turned off immediately.** It is recommended that if it is in a difficult location, or within a kitchen unit, easy access is maintained.

**Storage of Caravans:** The storage of caravans or similar vehicles is the occupier's responsibility. The Diocese cannot guarantee that a diocesan house will have an area suitable for caravan storage. If a particular site is suitable, that may be a bonus, but there will be no modification of a site for that purpose by the Diocese. The diocese may consider it if the occupier wishes to meet the cost of such an arrangement and a written request is made.

**Telephones:** The Diocese is responsible for the installation of the infra structure/line only (normally BT). A grant of up to £40 is available towards handsets and extra sockets. This grant can be claimed by forwarding receipts to the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities. Rental charges, repair, maintenance and replacement of handsets is the responsibility of the occupier or of the PCC as locally agreed. The

diocese is not responsible for installing, maintaining or providing extra points for answering machines, computers, or other office, electrical and electronic equipment. During vacancy, the charge for line rental will be the responsibility of the PCC if they wish to keep the number. Any reconnection fee is the responsibility of the occupier or PCC.

**Telephone line arrangements during a vacancy/tenancy:**

**Any change of supplier will need to be arranged locally which will include dealing with all final invoices, termination of contract and appointment of new supplier.**

Contact BT on 0800 800 150 (or other company) to make arrangements for their "Caller Redirect" service.

Caller Redirect will allow calls to a property to be redirected to someone in the parish e.g. churchwarden or parish office.

The tenant will then have the use of the house line but with a different telephone number. The tenant will be charged for line rental and calls.

The cost to set this up for a period of six months is approximately £20 per month and will be met by the PCC. They should ensure that bills are in the name of the PCC. Please note that BT offer a 3, 6 or 12 month contract and it should be made clear at the start of any contract with the telephone company, which option is preferred by the PCC.

The tenant will be required to contact BT to obtain a telephone number for the diocesan property.

On reoccupation by an incumbent, the PCC will need to cancel "Caller Redirect". BT will provide a stop order reference number.

**Thermostatic Radiator Valves:** There is a rolling programme to fit all radiators with controllable thermostatic valves and this is carried out at the time of quinquennial inspection or when a boiler is replaced.

**Tiling:** Ceramic tiling, once applied, becomes a permanent feature. Permission from the Diocese should therefore be sought prior to this work proceeding locally. Please do not paint any wall or floor tiling without authority from the Houses Department. The diocese does not recommend ceramic floor tiling to timber floors. The reason being they do not allow timber to breathe and they create problems when accessing services.

**Trees:** Occupiers have a duty of care not to plant trees without prior permission from the diocese. Advice and written permission should always be sought from the Houses Department before any tree is planted or replaced. Trees, when placed near to buildings, can cause severe and very expensive structural damage. There are regulations in force concerning trees covered by Tree Preservation Orders and trees in Conservation Areas. These are strictly enforced by the local authority whose

written consent is required before any tree work is carried out, even if the tree is diseased or dead.

Unauthorised lopping or felling, or the causing of damage to a tree, could result in a fine and can cause much ill-feeling. Any fines/costs arising from unlawful work will be the responsibility of the occupier. Normally when work to trees is required the Houses Department will appoint a specialist contractor who will be required to consult with the local planning authority before proceeding.

Trees will be inspected at quinquennial year and any works identified as necessary under diocesan criteria will be carried out. The priority of the inspection is to manage and maintain the health and safety of the trees in relation to risks against people and property, as well as reducing maintenance liability and costs for all parties.

The diocese will consult with the necessary authorities as required prior to tree removal and will take a practical and realistic view in regard to long term management of its gardens where there are large or numerous trees.

**TV Aerials, Cable TV, and/or Satellite Receivers:** TV aerials are normally owned by the Diocese and, for the purposes of insurance, will form part of the fixtures and fittings of a house. It is diocesan policy to supply and fit one tv aerial point, usually to the lounge. If additional points are required, the cost of this work will be the occupier's responsibility. If an aerial is installed by the occupier, this should be covered by their own house contents insurance. Occupiers should consult the Houses Department before installing a satellite dish. They should also bear in mind that planning permission is required and will not normally be granted for dishes on Listed buildings. It is an offence not to apply for Listed building consent. The installation of any of the above should only be carried out by reputable contractors.

**See also: Insurance of Houses** (p. 19)

**Unauthorised Works:** Any costs for the repair of unauthorised works will be the responsibility of the occupier under the terms of the RBBM Annex D Summary of Main Duties and Rights as follows: - Information paper H.

“The Diocese considers any representations received, and if consent is refused, serves notice requiring restoration of unauthorised additions or alterations. It has the right to take proceedings to enforce claim and recover costs if necessary.”

“The incumbent has to restore parsonage to original condition (or to such standard as may be agreed with the Board) and pay any associated costs.”

**Utility Bills (gas, electric, telephone, water):** Remains in the responsibility of the occupier if services are used by contractors during works to a house, neither the Diocese nor the contractor will cover these costs. The costs are deemed negligible. Any change of supplier will need to be arranged locally which will include dealing with all final invoices, termination of contract and appointment of new supplier. If the house is to be let, responsibility for the payment of all utility bills will pass to the tenant from the date when the tenancy commences. It will revert to the diocese when the tenancy terminates.

**Vacating:** The Houses Department will contact the outgoing incumbent prior to their departure to arrange usually for the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities to carry out an outgoing visit. A vacancy checklist (see Information Paper C) will be provided prior to that visit or can be obtained upon request from the Houses

Department. The checklist gives advice to outgoing occupiers and churchwardens on procedures to be followed at a vacancy.

**It is the occupier's responsibility to ensure that the house (including the loft), garage and gardens are cleared of all possessions and left clean, tidy and in good repair.**

The Bishop reserves the right and will attempt to recoup any costs incurred by the diocese in cleaning or clearing items left by the outgoing occupier. Local Councils or Charity Shops can organise collection of unwanted items.

**Washing Line Poles:** The provision of these is the responsibility of the Diocese and will be supplied upon request as necessary. Rotary airers will not be provided by the Diocese, however, it is recognised that some occupiers may wish to install them. Occupiers are asked to ensure that all rotary airers are fitted in accordance with manufacturers' recommendations.

**Water Charges:** When a parsonage house is occupied by an incumbent, the Parochial Church Council is responsible for the payment of water rates. If a house is occupied by a full-time sector minister, the rates are met from the Diocesan Office. Where the sector minister has some duties within the parish, e.g. 40%, the Diocese will meet 60% and the parish 40% of the water rates. Tenants occupying any diocesan owned property are responsible for the whole payment of water rates. Responsibility will revert back to the PCC once a tenancy terminates.

PCCs must notify the appropriate authority of the date when a house is vacated. Usually, provided no water is being used and the property contains no furnishings, charges for water services may be waived. However, this may vary locally. A rebate may also be due. In the event of the Diocese carrying out major works requiring water services the supply should be maintained during a vacancy for use by contractors. Water rates will be due during this period and will be payable by the PCC.

It is now Northumbrian Water's policy that charges for water and sewerage services remain in full unless Northumbrian Water has turned off the supply of water at the mains at a customer's request.

It will be necessary for the PCC to contact Northumbrian Water to have the supply reconnected prior to the diocese arranging for the heating and water system to be re-commissioned.

**Water Meter Charges:** The decisions to fit water meters is a local one and this should be after consideration of varying occupation types. Costs may be more with a meter than without. Free removal of the meter is only available within a twelve month initial period. A standing charge is payable where water meters are fitted. This charge is the responsibility of the occupier/Parochial Church Council. When a house is vacant the standing charge will remain the responsibility of the PCC. There are no standing charges where water meters are not fitted.

**Whitegoods:** Plumbing for dishwashers, washing machines, and vents for tumble-dryers (if space permits) will be provided at Diocesan expense and where designated by the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities. The occupier is responsible for the installation and all connection costs of all white good appliances. The Houses Department will make every effort to try to accommodate an occupier's

white goods in the kitchen or utility but unfortunately it cannot significantly adapt or refurbish these rooms for the purpose of accommodating any particular appliances. Repairs to appliances are the responsibility of the occupier. Where damage is caused to the structure or house contents by a faulty appliance or poorly fitted flexible pipes, the occupier will be responsible for any costs incurred. Where the damage is resultant from fixed plumbing, the Diocese will be responsible.

**THESE POLICIES HAVE BEEN REVIEWED AND AGREED BY THE DIOCESE AND ARE IMPLEMENTED THROUGH THE HOUSES DEPARTMENT. WHERE A DEVIATION FROM POLICY CONTAINED IN THIS HANDBOOK IS REQUESTED, A WRITTEN REQUEST SHOULD BE MADE TO THE DIOCESE.**

## Information Paper

### VACANCY NOTES OUTGOING INCUMBENT/OCCUPIER

#### Introduction

When a vacancy is announced there are certain requirements and responsibilities for those parties involved i.e. the outgoing occupant, the PCC/Churchwardens, and the Diocesan Office. It is hoped that those parties involved will work together ensuring that all duties and responsibilities are met. The following notes should be used to assist in the preparation of the house for vacancy.

Further guidance can be found in 'A Guide to the Upkeep of Houses', and by contacting the Houses Department, during office hours, Tel: 01388 604515.

Please complete the checklist attached to these notes and return it to the **Houses Department, Cuthbert House, Stonebridge, Durham, DH1 3RY.**

#### Incumbent's Responsibilities

**1. House and Garden** - The house (including the loft), garage and gardens must be entirely cleared of all possessions and left clean, tidy and in good repair. If there are any repairs or items you feel require attention, please raise these during the outgoing visit. Parish equipment should not be left in the house. Items left in an unoccupied house affect the terms of the insurance and water rates will be chargeable.

#### **2. Services/utility suppliers**

##### **PLEASE DO NOT DISCONNECT ANY SERVICES OR SUPPLIES.**

All meters, including gas, electricity and water, should be read. Please advise the Houses Department of the utility suppliers and final meter readings by completing the attached checklist.

All Gas and Electrical services are to be transferred to the Diocese, please ensure that the PCC Treasurer is aware of this.

**3. Keys** - Two full sets of keys should be labelled, one must be handed into the Houses department and the other passed to the church warden. All other keys should be left in the house. Window keys should be left in window locks or on a window sill. Meter keys should be left in a kitchen cupboard/drawer. Please dispose of all known to be obsolete keys to prevent confusion for those looking after the house and those that follow.

**4. Security and Alarm** -The house should be left as secure as possible with any security problems or concerns identified on the attached checklist. **Please inform the keyholder and the Houses Department of the security code for the intruder alarm.** Please include any concerns regarding the house, neighbours, boundaries or area generally.

**The outgoing incumbent is advised that the Bishop, in the event of one or more of the above requirements not being met, reserves the right to ensure that the necessary action is taken to meet the requirements and forward any relevant costs accrued on to the outgoing incumbent.**

## OUTGOING CHECKLIST

Property Reference:.....

### House and Garden

	Please tick	Notes
<b>HOUSE</b>		
<b>LOFT</b>		
<b>GARAGE</b>		
<b>OUTHOUSES</b>		
<b>GARDEN</b>		

### SERVICES AND UTILITY SUPPLIERS:

I have read all the meters and have forwarded the information to the relevant suppliers for

<b>Gas Provider</b>		<b>Final Reading</b>	
<b>Elec Provider</b>		<b>Final Reading</b>	
<b>Water Provider</b>		<b>Final Reading</b>	
<b>Oil Supplier</b>		<b>Final Level</b>	
<b>Telephone Provider</b>			

<b>Notes</b>
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## DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES WHEN HOUSE VACANT

### NEW VACANCY PROCEDURE

#### Introduction

The Churchwardens and Area Deans automatically become the Sequestrators under the ***Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure 2000, and the Endowments and Glebe Measure 1976***. The diocesan registrar normally advises the churchwardens and area deans of their duties as Sequestrators. The role of the Sequestrators also includes the maintenance of services, care for the house, and preparation for the arrival of the new incumbent.

During a vacancy, general responsibilities for vacant houses fall upon the Sequestrators (Churchwardens and Area Dean) and the Diocese. The role of the Sequestrators, in terms of the house, include two main areas:

- 1) care for the house and garden
- 2) preparation of the house for the arrival of the new incumbent

They are also responsible for all receipts and payments as a result of the above item 2. The PCC will be responsible for all utility charges, expenses etc. If in doubt please check with the Accounts Department in the Cuthbert House.

Please liaise fully with the outgoing incumbent to ensure the following arrangements occur:

#### **Outgoing incumbent: responsibilities**

##### **1. House and Garden**

The outgoing family has a duty and is responsible for:

- Leaving the property clean and tidy, including the gardens, hedges etc.
- Removing all of their personal possessions, including any inherited.

##### **PCC : responsibilities**

Any items left in the property will become the responsibility of the Sequestrators for removal and disposal. Items left in unoccupied houses affect the terms of the insurance and water rates will be chargeable.

Garden will be looked after by the diocese where the parish cannot.

##### **2. Services/utility suppliers**

The outgoing occupier should ensure that all services are transferred to the Diocese during a vacancy. This applies to gas and electric, and will include all costs and standing charges.

**Water:** charges will not apply during vacancy if the house is empty of all furniture and equipment except carpets and curtains, **and the water is turned off by the water company**. Please do not turn the water on again.



**Northumbrian Water's** policy is now that unless they attend and turn off the supply at the mains, the water charges will still be payable. Northumbrian Water will need to be contacted to reconnect the supply before the heating and water systems can be re-commissioned prior to the house being reoccupied.

If the telephone is a parish number that the parish wishes to retain then the following is a suggestion for the parish to consider:

**Telephone:** could be diverted through to a number specified by the PCC, to either the parish office or a member of the PCC, ensuring continuity of the business side of the church. The procedure to be followed is:

- Contact BT on 0800 800 150 to make arrangements for their "Caller Redirect" service.
- Caller Redirect will allow calls to a Diocesan property to be redirected to someone in the parish eg churchwarden or parish office
- The tenant will then have the use of the house line but with a different telephone number. The tenant will be charged for line rental and calls
- The tenant will be required to contact BT to obtain a telephone number for the Diocesan property
- The cost to set this up for a period of six months is approximately £20 per month. Please check the length of contract with the telephone company. They can vary between 3, 6 and 12 month contracts
- On reoccupation by an incumbent the PCC will need to cancel "Caller Redirect". BT will provide a stop order reference number
- Costs for this will be met by the PCC. The PCC should ensure that all bills are in the name of the PCC responsible for the payment.

**Services:** It is Diocesan policy to drain down wet systems particularly in the colder months indeed it is also a requirement of the insurers that all vacant properties are drained during the months October to March.

### 3. Keys

We ask that at least 2 sets of keys which should be labelled. One set should be retained by the churchwarden. One set of keys should be handed to the Houses Department .

### 4. Security and Alarm

All keyholders know the code for the intruder alarm and how it operates. Frequent visits to an unoccupied house is essential. It is a requirement of the diocesan insurers that **houses are visited at twice weekly intervals**. The provision of curtains or nets at windows by the PCC, and the use of an occasional light on a timer, gives the impression of occupation.

Crime Prevention Officers also advise that gardens which are well kept and not shrouded or hidden beyond overgrown hedges and trees assist in the impression of occupation and therefore deter vandalism and intruders. The diocese will arrange for maintenance of the shrubbery and hedges as well as grass cutting.

Any **damage** or **vandalism** to the house should be reported as soon as possible to the Houses Department during office hours. The police should be contacted and a crime number obtained.

If vandalism becomes a recurring problem, please advise the Houses Department as soon as possible, whereupon consideration will be given to additional security measures.

## **5. Use of House by PCC**

Occasionally, a parochial church council may wish to make use of a house while it is unoccupied. Written agreement of the Sequestrators, the Diocese, and ultimately the Bishop, must be sought. If the PCC wishes to have the water left on, and perhaps make use of the heating system, then the Houses Department will need to advise the insurers. The PCC will meet all costs of any fuel used, standing charges, and any use of electricity whilst the house is temporarily unoccupied, as well as any insurance costs for their possessions whilst using the house. Water rates will be payable by the PCC.

It is appreciated that during a vacancy there are added responsibilities for Sequestrators and PCCs in looking after the house. The Diocese is appreciative of all that they do.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Houses Department (**01388 604515**) if there are any concerns regarding the house.

### **Diocese: responsibility**

The Diocese may be instructed by the Bishop to let a property during a vacancy. The Diocese will seek the consent of the Sequestrators in granting a tenancy relating to the house for an initial period of six months.

The Houses Department, or the diocesan agents, in consultation with the Sequestrators, will be responsible for:

1. Arranging inspection of the house prior to or after vacation has occurred to ensure all parties have executed their responsibilities. The agent will prepare letting particulars, where the Bishop requests a let.
2. Arrange for the draining down of all wet systems during the months October to March unless written permissions have been given for the PCC to use the house during vacancy, and agreement of the insurers have been secured.
3. Re-commission a house and heating system, not more than two weeks prior to reoccupation under the terms of the insurance, to enable the Sequestrators or other, access to prepare and ready the house for the arrival of a new incumbent.
4. Organise the monitoring of houses during vacancy and tenancy. Responding quickly to any security or repair problems to prevent further damage. Any necessary

repair work or improvements will be investigated and remains the responsibility of the Diocese.

### **House Tenanted**

It is now policy to attempt to lease all vacant houses, except where the Bishop states otherwise, for an initial period of six months. This brings Durham Diocese into line with what is a growing trend nationally in order to generate additional funds towards the parish share across the diocese. As well as generating income for the diocese, leasing houses also provides security for the property and reduces the duties placed upon the Sequestrators. However, until such time as the vicarage is let the Sequestrators retain legal responsibility for the care of the house and any outgoings. All utility accounts should be retained in the name of the PCC. This responsibility remains with the PCC until such time as a tenancy is agreed and the house is contractually let. Where a tenancy ends and the house is removed from the lettings market and held for clergy re-occupation, responsibility will revert to the PCC on the date the tenant vacates the property. Where the house is held for a further tenancy the utility accounts will revert to the PCC but reimbursement can be sought from the Houses Department. The PCC will be asked to keep an eye on the house during vacancy.

### **Procedure to be followed**

1. The Houses Department will require one of the sets of keys, held by the Sequestrators, for viewing and access purposes.
2. When a suitable tenant is identified, an assured shorthold tenancy will be put in place and the Sequestrators notified.
3. The Houses Department or the diocesan agents will organise access for the re-commissioning of the property, its wet systems and heating.
4. The Houses Department will notify the Sequestrators of the commencement date of the tenancy and ask them to notify the relevant service bodies of the change of payee (electricity, gas, water etc).
5. The Houses Department will advise the local authority of the change of occupancy in the light of council tax and other charges etc for which the tenant will be solely responsible.
6. The Houses Department will keep the Sequestrators informed at regular intervals with regard to the tenancy. Where an extension to a tenancy is requested, the Houses Department will consult with the Archdeacon and Sequestrators.
7. Where a tenant notifies the agents of their intention to vacate, the Houses Department will liaise with the Sequestrators and advise accordingly. When the tenant vacates, the Houses Department will ensure that all possessions are removed.

8. The diocesan agents will carry out an end of tenancy inspection and advise the Houses Department of any necessary repairs or cleaning. The Diocese will be responsible for this.

### **Preparation of the House for a New Incumbent**

#### **Sequestrators' responsibilities:**

Upon notification that a new incumbent is to be appointed the house will be inspected by the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities

#### **Diocese responsibilities**

A small financial contribution will be provided from the diocese towards ingoing decoration or the property may be fully decorated if the condition is deemed unacceptable by the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities.

The Diocese will attend to any objective repairs or improvements deemed necessary by the Diocesan Head of Property and Facilities.

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## Information Paper

### ADVICE ON REDUCING CONDENSATION

The direct cause of condensation is not always easy to determine. It is often a combination of low air temperature, high humidity, poor ventilation, limited insulation but principally results from the everyday activity of household tasks.

Condensation will occur where warm moist air comes into contact with a cold surface. The air is cooled causing the water vapour to condense into droplets and water film. Condensation if left unchecked can assist mould growth, deterioration of finishes and in extreme cases rot timber.

Here are a few typical examples of moisture production in the home:

2 people at home for 16 hours 3 pints

A bath or shower 2 pints

Drying clothes indoors 9 pints

Cooking and the use of a kettle 6 pints

Washing dishes 2 pints

Bottled gas heater (6 hours use) 4 pints

Some helpful tips to reduce the levels of condensation and the likelihood of excessive dampness and mould growth:

- Good ventilation of kitchens when washing or drying clothes or cooking is essential. Open the windows to these rooms, but keep the doors closed as much as possible. Cover boiling pans and do not leave kettles boiling.
- If washing is put to dry, for example, in a bathroom or kitchen, open a window or turn on the extractor fan. Do not leave the room doors open or moist air will spread to other rooms.
- Do not use unventilated airing cupboards for drying clothes as this will encourage a moisture build up.
- After bathing, keep the bathroom window open, and shut the door for long enough to dry off the bathroom. If possible wipe down the damp wall surfaces with a dry cloth or towel.
- Avoid the drying of clothes on radiators use clothes airers and whenever possible dry clothes outside on the line.
- Do not use portable paraffin or gas heaters.
- When possible provide continuous ventilation to a room by opening the window slightly. Always be mindful of the security risks and retain on a lockable stay. Newer windows should incorporate a trickle vent, which can be left open.
- Try and make sure all rooms are at least partially heated especially in colder weather. Condensation often occurs in unheated bedrooms or storage rooms.
- Clean and/or unblock permanent air bricks or passive vents within rooms.
- Avoid overcrowding rooms or cupboards with storage boxes or clothes tightly packed, if there is no air circulating mould growth is likely.

## PERIODIC CHECKS FOR OCCUPIERS

### 1. Once a Year

- Clear all rainwater goods to avoid blockages including gutters.
- Look at the trees in your garden – particularly after periods of high winds and in the spring. Keep any bushes, shrubs and trees trimmed in summer months as a security measure.
- Have chimney flues swept.
- If possible check the central heating header tank is full and the ball valve is free to move.
- Make a note if any floor boards become loose or broken, are there any signs of rot or decay, see dampness and fungal decay.
- Check inside the loft space for any signs of dampness to timbers or signs of water ingress. Ensure that there are no signs of any roof leaks by checking the ceilings to the bedrooms.
- Walk around outside the house to check the walls for any cracks. If there are, check inside at the same location and check if the wall feels damp or has any further cracks to the internal finishes. Contact the houses Department if there are concerns.
- Check around the window and door openings to determine if there are any gaps, if so, inspect the inside of the reveals for dampness.
- Walk around the house during or after heavy rainfall to check the rainwater goods. Check that rainwater is not over-spilling or running down the walls.
- Check to see if any internal finishes are excessively damp and is there any staining or deterioration to the surface.
- Garage:- Check for roof leaks with new staining to the garage ceiling. Check the floor for any new large cracks.
- Boundaries:- are fences becoming unstable? Do the boundary walls have excessive leaning or cracks, particularly if trees are close by.

## **2. Twice a Year**

- Check all plugs and cables to appliances are safe and there are no scorch marks.
- Clean out the extractor vents, using a vacuum cleaner or old toothbrush to remove the dust and dirt.
- Kill weeds to the drive and paving areas and remove moss or lichen growth to those paths or yards which remain in the shade.
- If applicable, rake the gravel on the drive ensuring the 'wheel tracks' are not worn down and that there is an even spread of gravel.
- Oil hinges to doors, windows and gate ironmongery.
- Check the airbricks to the external walls and clear away any obstructions, fallen leaves etc.
- Check the water pipes particularly to outside taps or in cellars.

## **3. Frequently**

- Keep rainwater and kitchen gullies free from leaves, litter or any other debris.
- Look at the roof for any defective or missing tiles or slates.
- Switch on the central heating for a few minutes once a week during summer months.
- Checks for leaks to the WC, overflows, flush-pipes etc.
- Clean the waste from the bath, sink and basins regularly to avoid blockage. Chemical drain cleaner solutions are available from most supermarkets.
- Wipe up condensation from window sills on winter days.
- Tighten any screws on hinges, locks, latches and other fittings before damage occurs, particularly to cupboards and kitchen units.
- Remove mould growth to window joinery and walls; most likely to the bathroom, kitchen and utility and storage rooms.
- Keep the property well ventilated with the regular opening of the windows, especially in the winter months. See advice on reducing condensation.

## Information Paper

### DANGER – CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

#### Solid Fuel, Wood and Oil Burning Appliances:

- get them checked
- sweep your chimneys
- and be safe

#### The Problem

Heating and cooking appliances fuelled by coal, smokeless fuels, wood and oil can be just as likely as gas appliances to cause carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning if they are poorly installed, faulty or incorrectly used. CO poisoning is mostly caused by inadequate ventilation or lack of correct maintenance of appliances, flues and chimneys. Some incidents are also due to incorrect installation or deterioration of the structure of the chimney. Poisonous CO gas is produced when fuel does not burn properly. You can die from CO poisoning, or your health can be permanently damaged.

CO gas is odourless and tasteless, and you will not know when it is present. It can kill or maim without warning in a matter of hours. You are particularly vulnerable when you are asleep. The elderly and the young are particularly at risk.

The early symptoms of CO poisoning include – tiredness, drowsiness, headache, dizziness, chest pains and nausea.

#### Make sure you are not at risk of CO poisoning

##### DO

- Empty ash from a solid fuel appliance regularly, as the fire may not burn properly and this may also damage the appliance;
- have your chimneys swept very regularly (at least once a year), even if you burn smokeless fuel.

##### DO NOT

- use the wrong fuel for your appliance;
- allow non-competent people to install or maintain your appliance or sweep your chimney;
- block or obstruct ventilation grilles or air bricks which provide fixed air paths;
- block or obstruct flue outlets or chimneys;
- cover an appliance or block the hot air outlets;
- use your appliance if you think that it or its chimney is not working correctly. Signs to look out for are fumes or smoke in the house, slower than usual burning, evidence of sooting, difficulty in lighting, and staining around the appliance casing, *particularly if you are suffering from any of the symptoms mentioned above.*



**Information Paper I**  
**Durham Diocesan Houses Department Information Sheet**  
**Japanese Knotweed**

Japanese Knotweed, native to Eastern Asia originally, was brought to Britain as an oriental plant in the mid-nineteenth century. Since then it has become widespread in the wild causing serious displacement of native flora and structural damage to buildings.

There are two main pieces of legislation which cover Japanese Knotweed which are:

**Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**

Listed under Schedule 9, Section 14 of the Act, it is an offence to plant or otherwise cause the species to grow in the wild.

**Environmental Protection Act 1990**

Japanese Knotweed is classed as 'controlled waste' and as such must be disposed of safely at a licensed landfill site according to the Environmental Protection Act (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991. Soil containing rhizome material can be regarded as contaminated and, if taken off a site, must be disposed of at a suitably licensed landfill site and buried to a depth of at least 5m.

An offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act can result in a criminal prosecution. An infringement under the Environmental Protection Act can result in enforcement action being taken by the Environment Agency which can result in an unlimited fine. You can also be held liable for costs incurred from the spread of Knotweed into adjacent properties and for the disposal of infested soil off site during development which later leads to the spread of Knotweed onto another site.

There are three species in the UK:

Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*)

The most widespread and troublesome bankside species



If you suspect you have discovered Knotweed, in the first instance please contact the Houses Department, who will investigate and consider a regime of treatment dependent upon site conditions.

**NOTES TO HELP FUTURE OCCUPIERS**  
(Please complete and leave for next occupier)

GAS METER LOCATION .....

NUMBER .....

GAS SUPPLIER .....

ELECTRIC METER LOCATION .....

NUMBER .....

ELECTRIC COMPANY .....

STOP TAP LOCATION .....

WATER METER LOCATION.....

NUMBER .....

WATER COMPANY.....

TELEPHONE PROVIDER .....

INTRUDER ALARM MAINTENANCE COMPANY .....

ON VACATING PROPERTY PLEASE INFORM KEYHOLDER OF ALARM CODE

GENERAL .....

**PLEASE INFORM THE HOUSES DEPARTMENT  
IF GAS OR ELECTRIC SUPPLIER IS CHANGED**