

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - (Revised 21/02/05)

There have been an increasing number of enquiries from clergy to the Diocesan Office regarding housing. As a result it was thought helpful to produce a list of the most frequently asked questions to guide clergy through the most common housing issues.

The list is divided into 5 main areas:

- Internal
- External
- Moving into your Home
- Moving out of your Home
- General questions / What to do in an emergency.

1. Internal House:

a. Internal Decorating: (See also 3 "Moving into your Home")

Q. What decorating can I do?

A. The house is your home and as such you can carry out any decorating you wish. However, at the same time we would remind you that the house will also be occupied by your successors in office. Using wallpaper or very strong coloured paints will make redecoration more difficult and expensive for clergy coming to the house after you.

We recommend that any decorating you carry out accommodates a scheme using pastel colours. We would be grateful if you kept all the ceilings and any gloss work in your house to brilliant white paint. We request that you do not apply any "Artex-like" paint finishes to ceilings and walls. We are unable to sanction painting of your kitchen or utility room units.

b. Floor Finishes: (See also 3 "Moving into your home")

Q. What type of floor finishes will I need to provide myself?

A. The Houses Committee's "A Minimum Performance Standard for Parsonage Houses" states the Houses Committee has adopted the following policy for the provision of internal floor finishes.

" Floors should be hard-wearing and washable in kitchen, bathrooms, w.c.s, utility room and entrance hall."

It would be appreciated if clergy chose to lay carpet rather than laminate or wooden floor coverings. It proves expensive and difficult to lift and re-lay wooden and laminate floors if work needs to be carried out to under floor services.

Should clergy require help in choosing suitable carpets, the recommended Diocesan suppliers have a wide range of carpets to select from. Please call the office if you require contact information.

c. Cat and Dog Flaps:

Q. Am I able to have a cat or dog flap fixed through one of the external doors?

A. Where permitted, cat and dog flaps may be fitted through external doors only.

It is the responsibility of the clergy to pay for both the cost of the cat/dog flap, and the cost of installing such a flap within the external door.

We will also require that you pay for the cost of the future reinstatement of the door panel/door structure in advance of the work being carried out. This cost can be deducted from your resettlement grant if you wish. If the door is a pvcu door, the work should be carried-out by an approved specialist contractor.

As with any other structural alteration to the house, no cat/dog flap can be installed without the written prior consent of the Diocesan Surveyor.

d. Kitchen Appliances:

Q. Are any kitchen appliances provided in diocesan houses?

A. The Diocese does not provide any kitchen equipment (“White Goods”) within its houses.

Where a property has been purchased and has come complete with built in kitchen equipment, the following policy has been adopted:

- i. When the Diocese purchases a house and prior to your occupation, work will be carried out to remove and make good kitchens which accommodate built-in “white” goods.
 - ii. Repair of existing built-in “white” goods rests with you. If you are not willing to accept the cost of such a repair, then the Houses Committee will carry out necessary alterations to the kitchen layout to accommodate your own appliances, thus securing an equitable future kitchen layout. The Houses Committee will pay for the removal of the existing white goods.
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e. Home Improvements:

Q. Am I able to request any improvements to my home?

A. The Diocesan Surveyor’s department holds on its database a facility for recording requests made by clergy. The database holds information about work which through budgetary constraints, or through prioritisation, we are unable to implement immediately. If such a request is made, you will receive a letter identifying the scope of the work, the priority it has received, together with a reference number which can be used when contacting the office at a future date. The items still remaining on the database at the end of a financial year are given a priority, are cost evaluated and incorporated into future budgets as considered appropriate.

Q. Am I able to remove or alter any fixtures and fittings in my home?

A. All fixtures and fittings included in your home are part of the fabric of the parsonage. If you would like to alter or replace any these items, please write or e-mail the Diocesan Surveyor before attempting any alterations.

f. Electrical Wiring and Equipment:

Q. What is the policy regarding electrical equipment and wiring within a parsonage house?

A. All electrically operated equipment owned by yourself is your responsibility. Its general safety and adequacy should be checked on a regular basis. It is important to note that faulty appliances can seriously affect residual current devices (the small switches in the consumer unit – these devices have replaced traditional wired fuses), the result of which will mean that your electricity supply will be cut.

Your home's electrical circuits are tested to NICEIC standards at the time of a quinquennial inspection, or that of in-going works. Where general electrical routine problems are encountered suggesting further investigation, an additional test is carried out at that time. The recommendations and standards of the Institute of Electrical Engineers have been adopted.

It is essential to remember that under no circumstances should the electrical wiring, or its associated equipment (switches, power sockets, ceiling roses etc), be altered or tampered with by yourself, members of your family, or any unauthorised person. Under new legislation such work would be illegal. It is important to remember that the above requirements include electrical equipment in gardens.

g. Security Alarm Systems:

Q. Does the Houses Committee provide security alarm systems?

A. We do not provide security alarm systems within our properties. However, where in the opinion of the appropriate Archdeacon and Diocesan Surveyor, the house is regarded as being sited within an area subject to higher levels of crime, or is considered vulnerable, security alarm systems can be considered for installation, subject to the approval of the Houses Committee.

If your house has been provided with a security alarm system it is important to remember that the responsibility and payment for its maintenance rests either with yourself, or your parish and it is recommended that a system be serviced every six months.

h. Telephones

Q. Who pays for my telephone?

A. We ensure that a British Telecom main telephone line services the house. However, the cost of rental for a telephone line and equipment rests with yourself or your parish.

If you feel that you require additional telephone sockets within your house, the cost of supply of the additional wiring and equipment must be met by yourself. However, prior to any authorisation, it is necessary to agree any work with the Diocesan Surveyor.

For the purposes of parish stationery and Diocesan directories, etc., we attempt to retain a telephone number with the property for the life of the house as a parsonage house. Therefore, when you leave your home, would you please ensure that your telephone service provider retains your telephone number.

i. Boilers and Heating Systems:

Q. Who pays for servicing my boiler?

A. The Houses Committee enters into contracts with heating engineers who carry out the servicing of your boiler on an annual basis. When your boiler is due for a service, you will receive a telephone call from the contractor, who will arrange a convenient appointment with you.

At the time of the service, please mention to the contractor any additional minor plumbing work that can be carried-out at the time of the boiler servicing (i.e. minor radiator problems, such as thermostatic controls, the boiler programmer, tap washers, etc.)

Q. What happens if I run out of Heating Oil?

A. Please ensure that you keep a regular check on the level of oil in your storage tank. If you feel that the sight gauge is giving an inaccurate reading, please contact the Diocesan Surveyor's office as soon as possible. The Houses Committee cannot accept responsibility for damage to heating systems as a result of clergy running out of heating oil. Under these circumstances the contractor will invoice clergy for the full cost direct.

j. Chimney Sweeping:

Q. Who pays for sweeping my chimneys?

A. The cost of sweeping a flue is the responsibility of clergy.

It is important to regularly sweep flues in order to ensure that there are no blockages following the spring/summer period. Further, you should use competent contractors, possibly someone with a recommendation from residents within your parish.

k. Wall Tiles:

Q. Am I allowed to change wall tiles, or to paint them with a proprietary paint?

A. It may be that you do not like the style or colour of wall tiles within your house. Our current policy is to provide wall tiles which are comparatively neutral, but also provide some variety either in texture, or in colours. However, wall tiles which are in a good condition, may not be replaced or painted.

l. Curtains and Blinds:

Q. Who provides curtains and blinds in my home?

A. All curtains and blinds are your own responsibility. Existing blinds will not be replaced from the Houses Committee budget. We do not provide replacement specialist blinds to roof lights.

m. Glazing to Windows & Doors:

Q. Who is responsible for accidental damage to glass in windows and doors?

A. The Houses Committee requests that you include cover for accidental damage to glass on your house contents insurance policy. We are unable to pay for replacement glass, whether single or double glazed. However, you will not be expected to pay for broken seals on double glazed units or structural related damage.

2. External House:

a. T.V. Aerials:

Q. Does the Diocese provide T.V. aerials?

A. The Houses Committee installs, replaces and maintains the main terrestrial television aerial and existing aerial sockets within a house. We do not supply additional television points.

If it is your intention to install additional television sockets within your home, it will be necessary for you to obtain the prior consent of the Diocesan Surveyor. All work will be carried out at your own expense by approved contractors.

Many families enjoy watching programmes delivered by satellite and cable television stations. The erection of a satellite dish is an essential part of the installation and we would ask that the dish is placed in an unobtrusive position that will not cause structural defects, or encourage the ingress of surface water. Where a cable company's telephone installation is agreed, it is essential that you ensure that the cable company makes good any disturbance to a driveway, garden and wall areas. The wayleaves will need to be agreed by the Diocesan Surveyor and will be at the cost of the occupier and any documentation will be required to contain sketch drawings identifying the line of wayleaves and the position of aerials. These documents need to be held at the Diocesan Office.

It should be remembered that satellite dishes often require planning permission prior to erection, particularly in Conservation Areas and where your home is listed.

b. Security Lights:

Q. Who replaces bulbs in external security lights?

A. Where external security lights exist in parsonage houses, clergy are responsible for changing the light bulbs. It is important to replace a bulb with an identical unit to that which exists. If damage to the light fitting occurs as a result of an inappropriate bulb, the Diocesan Office will be unable to refund cost of a new fitting. If help is required in identifying the type of bulb needed, please contact the Diocesan office.

When changing bulbs it is important to use adequate ladders. The work should be carried out in conjunction with another person giving support and stability to the bottom rungs of the ladder.

c. Chimney Cowl:

Q. Who pays for fitting cowls or mesh to chimney pots?

A. Cowls will be installed only where it is necessary to remedy a defective flue draught.

Drains:

a. Cesspools/Septic Tanks:

Q. Who pays for emptying our cesspool/septic tank?

A. The cost of emptying cesspools rests with the Houses Committee.

When you think that a cesspool or septic tank is becoming full, please contact the Diocesan Office, who will arrange and pay the cost of an appropriate contractor to empty the unit as soon as possible. It is generally recommended that a septic tank/cesspool is emptied once every 12 months, although some units are capable of working well after that period.

b. Gardens:

i. Garden Sheds:

Q. Am I provided with a garden shed?

A. We will not provide new sheds unless it is considered that there is a lack of adequate storage space within the house and its environs. Unless the existing shed structure poses a health and safety danger or the house storage facilities are considered inadequate, we will not repair "old" sheds. However, we will remove them if desired from the parsonage grounds.

ii. Garden Compost:

Q. Am I allowed to construct a compost heap within the garden?

A. Compost heaps are considered a necessary part of every day gardening and are often essential for the collection of general garden debris. However, we would ask that you ensure that the compost is well controlled, kept free from vermin and, at the end of your occupancy, (unless it is contained within a proper compost wall), is disposed of altogether.

iii Fences:

Q. Do you provide garden fences to control and retain family pets?

A. The only garden fencing which we provide is perimeter garden fences and those which isolate the house from the rear garden area. We do not provide fencing to control or retain pets, nor will we be able to amend existing fencing for those purposes.

iv Garden Planting:

Q. What recommendations are available when planting in my garden?

A. The Houses Committee requests that you do not plant any new trees in your garden nor any large shrubs close to the parsonage house or its out-buildings. We are very concerned about the effect of trees and shrubs on foundations and masonry. We are also anxious that new trees planted in a parsonage garden do not become protected by local authority Tree Preservation Orders. Further, we are concerned about the rising costs of tree maintenance affecting Houses Committee budgets. All self sown or newly planted trees will be removed from the garden prior to you moving into your home.

3. Moving into your home

Every effort will be made to ensure that your move is as straightforward as possible. You will have an opportunity to meet the Diocesan Surveyor at your new home to confirm the work identified by him as appropriate move-in works. Schedules of this work will be available for your consideration before or at the time of your Parish interview. At that time you will be able to discuss your own ideas.

Q. What decorating will be carried out for me?

A. As part of new occupancy works, if deemed necessary (and subject to an agreement between the Archdeacon and the Diocesan Surveyor), the following rooms will be fully decorated:

1. Hall, staircase and landing,
2. Study,
3. Kitchen.

Clergy will be expected to carry out any further decorating required. To assist in this, the Houses Sub-Committee may make a discretionary grant of £100 towards materials. It is hoped that when re-decoration takes place, you take into consideration the future re-decoration of the house. See also 1. a.

Q. When moving into my new home, am I able to decorate the rooms differently from the advice given in the answer to question 1a of this FAQ?

- A.**
- i. The colour scheme must be agreed with the Diocesan Surveyor,
 - ii. When agreed, a deduction will be made from your Diocesan moving-in grant at the rate of £50 per room. This cost is a nominal cost to allow for increased labour and materials needed for later redecoration.
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Q. Which floor coverings will be provided for me?

A. The hall, staircase, landing and study will be carpeted with a suitable material which is considered reasonably easy to clean and of a neutral colour.

Where houses have a separate entrance lobby, a suitably hard wearing and washable surface will be provided.

It has been decided that the most appropriate floor finish for wet areas (kitchen, utility room, cloakroom, bathroom, w.c., etc) will be a vinyl cushion floor. We request that you do not replace floor finishes provided by the Houses Committee without the prior consent of the Diocesan Surveyor. However, where such floor finishes are excessively worn, we will endeavor to replace them.

4. Moving out of Your Home:

Q. What am I expected to do upon leaving my home?

A. Prior to leaving your home, you will be contacted by both the clergy and lay representatives of the Houses Committee who will arrange a visit to meet with you and discuss your views about the suitability (or otherwise) of the parsonage. It would be most helpful if you were able to inform them of your impressions (both good and bad) of the house.

Would you please inform the Diocesan Surveyor's office of the names of your utility service providers, together with your customer reference numbers.

You will need to carefully note your utility meter readings and inform the respective companies of your intended leaving date and, of course, to ensure full payment of outstanding costs.

For gas, it is best practice to turn off the mains supply at the tap adjacent to the meter. However, you will need to extinguish your boiler and any other pilot lights first.

For electricity, you merely inform the service provider.

For telephone, contact the service provider. However, please ensure that the main parsonage telephone number is retained.

For heating oil, it would be most helpful if you were able to retain sufficient heating oil in the tank for the boiler to be re-fired and the heating system to be tested after you have left. To leave the tank with little oil in-situ can lead to costly repairs to the boiler fuel pump and burner.

Please remove all your possessions from the house, roof voids, garage and any out-buildings.

During any vacancy, the maintenance of the parsonage gardens are the responsibility of the churchwardens and PCC. Frequently, members of the church volunteer to keep the gardens tidy. However, if voluntary labour is not available and the P.C.C. is not able to meet any costs incurred, then the Diocesan Surveyor must be informed.

Finally, please return one set of keys to the Diocesan Office. It would be helpful if one of your churchwardens retained a further set.
