



DIOCESE OF DURHAM

**GUIDE NOTES FOR SEQUESTRATORS
DURING VACANCY**

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

SEQUESTRATORS: DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES WHEN HOUSE VACANT

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 Houses Committee. 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 when there is no incumbent, including all expenses incurred by the Sequestrators out of the sequestration account. This includes basic heating, garden upkeep, telephone charges, minor repairs and general maintenance. Please check with the Diocesan Office Accounts Department for details of what can and cannot be paid from the sequestration account.

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.
- Removing all personal possessions.

Sequestrators: 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.

Arrangements should be made locally for the upkeep of the garden. If there is someone with an interest in gardening, ask them to maintain the garden.

2. Services/utility suppliers

The Sequestrators should ensure that all services are maintained in the name of the PCC during a vacancy. This applies to gas, electric, water, oil and telephone and will include all costs and standing charges.

Gas: obtain details of supplier from outgoing incumbent and ensure final meter reading is taken.

Electricity: obtain details of supplier from outgoing incumbent and ensure final meter reading is taken. It is important to maintain the electricity supply to ensure that security alarms/lighting etc remain in working condition.

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.

Oil: check the oil tank level on day of incumbent's departure so that they may be reimbursed for any oil remaining in the tank. This can be paid from the sequestration account. When the house is reoccupied, the new occupier will be responsible for paying for the remaining oil.

Telephone: should 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 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 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.

It is important that the existing number is not lost.

Services: It is Houses Committee policy to drain down wet systems unless the PCC has written to the Houses Committee and gained approval to use the house during vacancy and the agreement of the insurers has been secured. It is also a requirement of the insurers that all vacant properties are drained during the months October to March.

If services are used by contractors during works to the property while it is vacant, these costs will be deemed negligible and will be met locally. If the house is tenanted, responsibility for the payment of all utility bills, including water rates, will pass to the tenant from the date when the tenancy commences. Responsibility for payment will revert back to the PCC when the tenancy terminates.

3. Keys

You will receive all keys for the house from the outgoing incumbent, two sets of which should be labelled. One set should be retained by the Sequestrators. One set of keys should be handed to the Houses Department for use by contractors/agents. Please ensure that keys are not handed out indiscriminately.

4. Security and Alarm

Ensure that 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 assist in the impression of occupation and therefore deter vandalism and intruders. The Sequestrators should arrange for general 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 Houses Committee, 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 and garden. The Houses Committee 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.

Houses Committee: responsibility

The Houses Committee may be instructed by the Bishop to let a property during a vacancy. The Houses Committee 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 Houses Committee.

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. When a decision to let is directed by the Bishop, the Houses Department will seek consent from the Sequestrators to authorise the Diocesan Property Manager to act on their behalf on all matters relating to the leasing of the property. **This will not involve the Sequestrators in any additional work**, indeed this will reduce their responsibilities towards the house

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.

At this point, the duties and responsibilities for the house return to the Sequestrators until such time as the house is either reoccupied by a new tenant or an incumbent.

8. The diocesan agents will carry out an end of tenancy inspection and advise the Houses Department of any necessary repairs or cleaning. The Houses Committee 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 Surveyor.

The incoming incumbent is responsible for the internal decoration of the house. It is a kindness and welcoming gesture if the Sequestrators can involve the PCC in assisting with this.

Houses Committee responsibilities

A small financial contribution will be provided from the diocese towards ingoing decoration.

The Houses Committee will attend to any objective repairs deemed necessary by the Surveyor.

Please also see Appendix A: Vacancy Notes: Outgoing Incumbent

It is appreciated that during a vacancy there are added responsibilities for PCCs and churchwardens in looking after the house and garden. The Houses Committee appreciates all that they do. Please do not hesitate to contact the Houses Department (01388 604515) if there are any problems or concerns regarding the house.

References

Further information can be found in the following:

- So the Vicar's Leaving
- Handbook for Churches and Church Councillors
- Houses Handbook (Yellow Book)