



## Central Appointment Properties Purchase & Maintenance Guidelines

### Introduction

The United Reformed Church is committed to providing suitable housing to stipendiary ministers who are appointed to central roles within the church and to maintain those properties.

### Purpose

This document sets out the guidelines for buying and selling of properties for centrally appointed stipendiary ministers, the areas relating to the property that the Church is responsible for and those that the minister would be responsible for. It is not intended to replace the guidelines regarding manses set out in the Plan for Partnership (most of which is incorporated within this document), but rather it aims to clarify the responsibilities of the Church and the appointee with regards to all aspects of the property.

### Scope

This document applies to all houses purchased for stipendiary ministers based at Church House (86 Tavistock Place, London, WC1H 9RT), those for whom Church House is their principal reporting base and Synod Moderators.

## 1. Purchase of Properties

### 1.1. Process

Once an appointment has been confirmed the appointing General Secretary (GS) or Deputy General Secretary (DGS) should get in touch with the RMHS General Manager and advise them that the appointee will be needing a house.

If the outgoing incumbent for the role has a centrally owned property, or the URC Trust or the Retired Ministers' Housing Society ('RMHS') has an available property that may be suitable, then the new appointee is expected to move into such property and should arrange to view it.

On rare occasion where the new appointee feels that the available properties mentioned is not suitable, they should communicate this in writing to the DGS (Admin & Resources), giving the reasons why they feel it is not suitable. This will then be referred to the Church House Management Group ('CHMG') to consider. CHMG have the authority to turn down a request that a new house is purchased if the committee regards the stated grounds of unsuitability to be unreasonable.

If the available properties are not deemed suitable, or there are no suitable existing properties, then a new property can be sought. It will be the appointee's responsibility to find a new property following the guidelines set out below.

#### 1.2. Location of the property

The chosen property must be located in England, Scotland or Wales (excluding islands such as Isle of Wight and must be within easy sustainable commutable distance from the appointee's main place of work.

Consideration should be given to other factors e.g. proximity to schools and shops and availability of public transport.

The URC Surveyor and relevant Synod staff (in the case of the property being for a Synod Moderator) or the line manager of the appointee (in all other cases) must also indicate their satisfaction with the location of the property before a purchase can be considered.

#### 1.3. Cost ceilings

The Church will purchase a property up to the regional ceilings which are based on the average cost over the preceding 4 quarters of detached houses in each area using data from the Land Registry. An overall ceiling of £800,000 will apply.

Properties listed at a cost above the regional ceiling may be considered but will require sign off from the CHMG (see section 8).

In establishing the cost of the property, any major works required will be included.

Reasonable costs of 'freshening up' the property (e.g. a new coat of paint) will be excluded.

The level and types of works that will be considered as 'freshening up' costs are set out in a section 1.6 below.

#### 1.4. Survey

The property will be subject to a survey before the Church will agree to purchase it. This survey will be undertaken by one of the RMHS Housing Surveyors employed by the Church. In the event that they are unable to inspect the property on a timely basis, then an external surveyor may be employed.

Should the survey indicate that the Church should not purchase the property, then an alternative property must be found. For this reason, appointees should avoid setting their hearts on a particular property as it is always possible that underlying issues with the property may make it unsuitable.

#### 1.5. The property

The size of the property will be somewhat determined by the price ceilings in the area, but the Church will aim to provide a property that has the following:

- Lounge
- Dining Room (separate if possible)
- Kitchen
- Hall (large enough to provide for cloaks)
- Study (downstairs is recommended for Synod Moderators. This is not necessary for Church House appointments)

- Bedrooms: at least 3 good size rooms – 4 if possible
- Bathroom and Toilet
- Downstairs toilet is seen as essential
- Garage and/or adequate parking
- Grounds – paths, gate and fences in satisfactory repair, garden of manageable size.
- Storage space
- Good internet connectivity

The house should have the following facilities and equipment:

- Full Central Heating
- Water heating system
- Bathroom fitted with modern equipment including a shower
- Kitchen of reasonable size with adequate space for larger electrical appliances
- Double-Glazing is desirable
- Adequate number of power sockets throughout the house
- Telephone points – including the study
- Security locks on external doors – and windows where possible
- Burglar Alarm
- Smoke detectors
- Curtain rails and light fittings in all rooms.

#### 1.6. 'Freshening up' costs

Costs of 'freshening up' the property that will be excluded from the calculation in determining if a property is within the cost ceiling should be reasonable and will include where necessary:

- Repairs to minor plaster defects
- A fresh coat of paint or replacement of wallpaper, if necessary, for internal, and where appropriate external walls
- New carpets/flooring or a deep clean of existing carpets
- Replacement of doorbells
- Deep clean of bathrooms, toilets and kitchens
- Integrated electrical equipment (see (1.7))

#### 1.7. White Goods

Free-standing white goods are not usually provided by the Church, the appointee needs to supply these. Integrated white good such as ovens will either come with the house, or will be supplied as part of a refurbishment prior to the appointee moving in.

On rare occasions where it is not possible for all the essential white goods (Fridge/Freezer/Washing Machine/Cooker/Dishwasher) to form part of an integrated kitchen the Church will provide free-standing units but these will represent a taxable benefit upon the appointee for as long as they reside in the manse and the equipment is functioning. Free-standing units provided by the Church may have tax implications for the appointee.

## 2. Ongoing maintenance

### 2.1. Structural

The Church will be responsible for the ongoing maintenance of all structural aspects of the house including windows, external doors and roofing.

### 2.2. Redecoration

The need for any external decorations and paintwork will be assessed on a quinquennial basis and any required work will be at the Church's expense. Internal, other than paintwork, are the responsibility of the appointee. The appointee is responsible for maintaining the property in good decorative order.

### 2.3. Soft furnishings

The Church is responsible for carpeting the property. This will be done in consultation with the appointee. The cost of any initial re-carpeting will be included in calculating the tax free portion of resettlement costs and may result a tax liability for the appointee if the total resettlement costs exceed the HMRC resettlement threshold. The cost of subsequent re-carpeting will automatically result in a tax liability for the appointee. The appointee is responsible for all other soft furnishings.

### 2.4. Gardens

The appointee will be responsible for all aspects of general garden maintenance except where a specialist is required, for example if a large tree needed lopping or similar.

### 2.5. Fences

The responsibility for fencing should be set out in the property deeds. The Church will pay for its share of costs pertaining to fences and, where applicable, will seek to negotiate with neighbours should it become necessary to perform any major works on boundary fences.

### 2.6. Boiler maintenance

Annual services and any boiler maintenance and/or replacements will be for paid for by the Church. Contact numbers for emergency call out will be supplied by the Church.

### 2.7. Electrical & plumbing

The Church will be responsible for the maintenance of the electrical and plumbing systems in the house. Contact numbers for emergency call out will be supplied by the Church. Not appliances unless they are integrated kitchen appliances

### 2.8. Quinquennial inspections

The house will be subject to a quinquennial inspection by the RMHS housing surveyors. Remedial items identified during the inspection will be put right by the Church.

## 2.9. Gas safety certificates

The Church is responsible for ensuring gas safety at the property and is required by law to have an annual gas safety inspection done by a qualified person.

## 2.10. Kitchen and bathroom renewals

Generally new kitchens and bathrooms will be considered no earlier than every 15 years. There may, however, be cases where a new fit is necessary (e.g. where water damage has rendered the room unusable). Such instances will be considered on a case by case basis.

## 3. Utilities & Council taxes

The Church will pay water bills relating to the property as well as any Council Tax and, if applicable, ground rents.

## 4. Insurances

The Church is responsible for the buildings insurance while the appointee is responsible for all contents insurance.

## 5. Health & Safety

### 5.1. Fire risks

The Church will supply and fit smoke alarms and CO2 detectors, however, it is the appointee's responsibility to ensure that other fire safety measures are adhered to. A government guide to fire safety can be found here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/564803/Fire-Safety-in-the-Home.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/564803/Fire-Safety-in-the-Home.pdf)

### 5.2. Burglar alarms

The Church will pay for an alarm system to be fitted and maintained at the property.

## 6. Special needs

If an appointee or a dependant who will be living in the property require special disability adaptations to be made to the property, these will be considered by CHMG on a case-by-case basis.

## 7. Tax Implications

From a tax point of view, there are limits imposed for expenditure on removals and resettlement of a minister. These thresholds take into account any resettlement grants given to the appointee, the cost of removal and the provision of certain assets (free standing white goods/carpets etc. The current threshold for resettlement, as permitted by HMRC, is £8k and has been at this level for several years. The appointee is advised to consult with Church House staff regarding any tax implications when considering settling into a new property.

## 8. Delegated authority levels

### 8.1. Offer to purchase

The final offer to purchase must be signed off by a person delegated to do so by the URC Trust. In Church House this is usually The General Secretary, The Deputy General Secretary (Admin & Resources) or the Chief Finance Officer. Documentation setting out the offer price and the estimated cost of initial works needed to be done to the property must be included with the paperwork submitted to the person signing the offer.

If the overall cost is within the ceiling (see 1.3), then any one of designated officers can sign the offer form.

If in rare circumstances, there is a compelling reason why the ceiling needs to be breached, the case for exceeding the ceiling must be circulated to and agreed by a quorum of the members of CHMG.

### 8.2. Payment for property

The request for payment in respect of the purchase price of the property should be authorised by one of the delegated officers mentioned above. Ideally it should be a different one to the one who authorised the offer to documentation.

### 8.3. Major works, repairs, refurbishments & maintenance (initial or subsequent)

One detailed specifications and quotes have been received for the initial works, these should be signed off as follows:

<b>Amount</b>	<b>Responsible person</b>
£0 - £1,000	Repairs & Maintenance Co-ordinator
£1,000 - £3,000	Housing Surveyor
£3,000 - £10,000	CFO/GS/DGS/General Manager RMHS
Above £10,000	CHMG

### *Owner*

Any queries regarding these guidelines should be addressed to the Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources).

### *Approved by*

These guidelines were approved for use by the Church House Management Group on 23 January 2019

### **Review**

This policy will be reviewed 24 months from the last review date.