

15. Methodist Ministers' Housing Society

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1. Introduction

1.1 Our early history

At the end of the Second World War property prices were high and rented property hard to find. The Methodist Church realised that after years of faithful service, some retiring ministers were struggling to find and afford a new home. Two main factors were behind this. The first is the itinerant nature of Methodist ministry: tending to move every five to eight years. Secondly, stipends then did not usually provide enough for them to save up for a home in retirement.

The turning-point came on 29 April 1947, in the form of a generous donation. The ownership of a property known as The Manor House in Barrow-on-Trent in the County of Derbyshire (along with its orchard garden, paddock and other buildings) was transferred to the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, stipulating that it be used to house retired Methodist ministers of limited means. In 1948, the Methodist Ministers' Housing Society was formed, registered with the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1893.

1.2 Our situation today

Ours is a long-term ministry. As life expectancy increases, people retiring today are likely to live longer. We therefore plan for the long term and all the resources of the Society are ploughed into improving the service and providing for a growing number of ministers. That is why our vision is to continue to provide good-quality housing and support to our community of tenants on terms appropriate to their means, in locations throughout the Connexion for at least the next 40 years.

The Society has an asset base of unencumbered properties throughout the UK with a conservative market value of £150 million, and a turnover of £3 million. The Board is to carry out a major strategic and governance review to ensure that the Society is in excellent shape to make decisions for the future. We have strengthened our Board with new members having specific skills which would help this to happen. We are in the process of reviewing our repair and maintenance service and are modernising our administrative functions to make the delivery of our services to our tenants more cost effective and efficient.

2. Provision in 2013/14

In the year ending August 2013 19 properties were provided for new supernumeraries and 8 tenants were transferred to accommodation more suitable for their current needs. This is a lower figure than in previous years, and the Board will be considering this issue in the course of the following year.

In the year to 31 August 2013, seven properties were purchased, fifteen were sold and one property has been bequeathed to us. We are immensely grateful to those who remember us in this way. The purchases were for transferring tenants, those who had superannuated on medical grounds and single people.

All those ministers who retired in August 2013 and required, and were eligible for, our services were allocated a property of their choice and we are so thankful for the Lord's provision. Not all properties which are left to us, or which become vacant when a tenant moves on are suitable for reuse and during the course of the year we have sold 15 properties. This was for a number of reasons - for example some had structural defects, and some were in poor condition. At the end of February 2014 there were 94 available properties for new supernumeraries. Of these, 86 were market rented on short term tenancies, and 8 were occupied by tenants awaiting transfer.

3. Rent

The rent increase policy which began on 1 September 2013 has been a concern, but we were pleased that for 2013/2014 we have been able to rebate the increase on the basis of using half the donated and legacy income to set against the increase. This amounted to £299 and reduced the rent increase from £2,459.00 to £2,160.00. As a result of efficiencies we were also able to reduce our overheads and thus made a small operating surplus. This is an encouraging sign for the future and we are on course to financial stability which we will achieve by August 2016 when the planned maintenance programme is due to restart.

During the year, 16 vacant properties were refurbished and allocated to new and transferring ministerial applicants.

4. Planned maintenance programme

Even though we have suspended the planned maintenance programme (cyclical replacement of kitchens, bathrooms and external painting) a number of kitchens and bathrooms, which had reached the end of their useful life, have been replaced where it was prudent to do so. In the course of the year we have replaced 12 kitchens and 14 bathrooms (including 6 bathroom adaptations) and we have replaced 48 boilers in our properties. We have also re-laid eight driveways where they presented a health and safety risk.

5. Repairs and maintenance

In the course of our consultation meetings regarding the rent issue, it became evident that our repairs and maintenance service was falling well short of our tenants' expectations. The Board therefore committed itself to reviewing the whole service and introducing significant improvements over the next 12 months. This has been completed and we have entered into a contract with British Gas for gas safety and servicing and electrical repairs and safety checks. Emergency repairs to fabric are being carried out by Home Assistance UK and drainage emergencies by Dynorod. We are working in partnership with our tenants and local contractors to provide a day to day repairs service and early indications show that this is working well with a marked improvement in overall service. The object of this exercise has been to reduce expenditure, increase efficiency, and enhance tenant satisfaction with our services.

6. Other Activities

The Society has also during this year revised its rules, reviewed its tenancy agreements, carried out a Board recruitment programme and now has the expertise to carry out all conveyancing work in house.

7. Membership

In 2012, the Revd Pat Billsborrow became Chair of the Board. At the AGM in February 2014 Pat stepped down from the post but remains on the Board as a co-opted member – the Society is immensely grateful to Pat for steering the Society through some difficult days. Dr John Lander became Chair at the AGM having joined the Board in February 2013.

A number of members of the Society also resigned their membership at the AGM and we thank them for their long and loyal service.

At the AGM in February 2014, three members of the Board, the Revd Richard Teal, Ann Brook, and Ros Peedle were re-elected for a further three year term. Max Teare and the Revd Jacqui Evans were elected to the Board.

Rob Lolley retired from the Board on ill health grounds. We are very grateful for his dedicated service to the Society.

8. The Staff Team

During the course of the year we have recruited a new property administrator, Linda Emmanuel to replace Rumina Khatun. The Board would wish to thank and pay tribute to the hard and dedicated work of all the staff team during the past year.

9. Conclusion

Almost from the very beginning we have managed to house all those who have come to us in need of accommodation. We are proud to provide homes for over 900 supernumerary presbyters, deacons and their widowed partners, so they can enjoy their well-deserved retirement. The task is a continuing one as we commit the Society to continue to serve the needs of those who have been engaged in full time ministry within the Methodist Church. That commitment and ongoing vision is for us enshrined in some words by Charles Wesley: "To serve the present age, my calling to fulfil".

*****RESOLUTION**

15/1. The Conference received the Report.