

1 December 2023

By Email:

Dear Colleague,

Update of Key Property Initiatives

I write to tell you about some important property initiatives that we are currently working on to help improve the property service you receive. At the centre of our Property Business Plan is the aim 'to provide a good quality property and estate service that supports our clergy so that they can concentrate on ministry'. The information contained in this letter is to make you aware of what is happening and the changes you will see in 2024. More detail on both initiatives will follow in due course as we move to implement the changes.

We are always looking to identify better and more efficient ways to deliver our property service. For example, in 2022 we introduced **Fixflo** for reporting property issues and we are really encouraged how this has been embraced by all of you. So far this year we received 1,114 repair requests with 962 complete and 152 open of which the majority of these will be with contractors waiting for repairs to be undertaken. **Fixflo** has been really helpful in managing the requests coming into the Property Team with further improvements having taken place this year so that we can now interact with our contractors, enabling us to track issues from reporting to closure.

We are now looking at how we can further enhance the service and working with the Archdeacons and the Property Committee, I am pleased to say that the following initiatives will be rolled out in 2024.

Stock Condition Surveys (SCS)

Having up to date and current data on all our properties is essential to plan what we need to do going forward. Currently, the majority of our works are reactionary and dependent when properties become vacant. This is inefficient and expensive as vacancy works are procured on an individual property basis. Being able to prepare a medium term property budget is also difficult without knowing what works will need to be undertaken. Additionally, the current approach means some long-serving clergy experience a deterioration in the quality of their property the longer they stay in post.

Going forward we want to ensure that all our properties are brought up to a consistent standard and that you do not have to move to see improvements in the quality of your accommodation. To enable this we will undertake full stock condition surveys of all our properties during 2024. These will be carried out by an external practice with support from the Diocesan Property Team. We will be in touch with you again before the survey of the property you occupy takes place with more details.

The output will be a detailed report per property setting out the condition of the whole property, an estimate of when key components (e.g. kitchens, bathrooms, windows, roofs) will need replacing and the expected costs of doing so. This approach will replace the current rolling Quinquennial Inspection process whilst still ensuring we meet our obligations under the Repair and Benefice Measure with the SCS exercise being repeated in five years' time.

From the information contained in the SCS, the Property Team will develop a long-term planned maintenance schedule, covering the subsequent five years in detail. This will be used to ensure that resources are allocated efficiently and that we can run bulk tenders for the services and goods we require.

However, this does mean that there may, in some instances, be less work done at vacancy as required works will be dealt with on a priority basis. We will though continue to ensure housing provided at the beginning of a role is up to a good standard and you know when key components are due to be upgraded. Whilst the plan will need to have a certain amount of structure to be effective, we will be as flexible as possible to accommodate changing family circumstances (e.g. ill health or a forthcoming move).

Gas & Electrical Services

Across the Diocese we currently use around 30 different contractors to undertake annual gas inspections, boiler repairs/replacements, electrical/alarm tests and other general plumbing and heating works. All of these contractors do things in slightly different ways and charge different prices. We are also aware that the quality of work varies as does the availability for out of hours emergencies. Therefore, in order to improve financial efficiency, provide a more consistent quality of service and to enable us to have robust contractual arrangements in place we are revising the way we do this work.

Existing and new contractors have been invited to tender against a detailed specification for two types of work (1 - plumbing and heating, and 2 – electrical) across two geographic areas (east and west). Tender returns have been received and recommendations will be presented to the Property Committee on 13 December 2023. If approved, we will award contracts to the successful firms and we will move to the revised approach in early 2024.

Unfortunately, this does mean that we will no longer be working with (or providing less work to) some of our existing contractors who have provided us service for many years. This is not a decision we have taken lightly but the financial realities we work within mean we must use the funds we have efficiently. Additionally, we want to ensure the level of service we provide you is of a high quality across the board. If any of the contractors mention the new contracts to you, please do just ask them to speak to the property team.

These two initiatives are a step change from what we have done in the past but essential to ensuring we can provide housing to the best possible standard. Inevitably with change there will be some concerns, however, please be assured we are working hard to ensure these changes are done in the right way and ultimately make you and your families more comfortable in our properties.

More detail will follow in the New Year but if anyone has any queries at this time then please do not hesitate to contact the Property Team on property@leeds.anglican.org.



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