



THE DISTRICT PROPERTY POLICY

POLICY STATEMENT

The District, through the Policy Committee, aims to support the growth and development of its Circuits and Churches as they seek to engage in God's mission and Christ's ministry. To assist the Circuits to deal with property matters we will:

1. Support, encourage and ensure the Managing Trustees of local churches maintain the local property to an acceptable standard, as each Church is required to maintain and carry out renovations and repairs as necessary. Such support will be given by the District Property Group on behalf of the District and represented by the District Property Secretary and his/her team.
2. Expect that all District and Circuit Ministers and Deacons are accommodated in appropriate properties to the agreed standard set out in SO.803.
3. Check, through the District's Schedule and Quinquennial Secretary, that quinquennial inspections on all local, Circuit and District properties have been duly arranged, that the recommendations contained within the quinquennial reports are acted upon responsibly, and that Managing Trustees are encouraged and assisted to maintain and develop local premises in response to their vision of mission for their church and the wider community.
4. Provide help, advice and technical support for property schemes that advance the mission of the Church. In doing so, District Officers must feel competent and experienced enough to consider technical aspects of a project or, if not, then to seek further advice from Connexional Officers.
Whilst questions relating to maintenance will continue to be dealt with by the local Managing Trustees, structural matters must be cleared through the District Property Secretary who will have the necessary competence and experience to consider technical aspects of a project. If necessary, the District Property Secretary will seek further advice from Connexional Officers, or elsewhere, any costs incurred being met by the individual church/circuit.
5. Where appropriate, provide financial assistance towards the cost of a scheme through a grant from the District Advance Fund. The Policy for the District Advance Fund was approved and adopted by the April 2007 Representative Synod, and it is primarily for development rather than maintenance.
6. Encourage and support local worship and mission by dealing with property matters simply, swiftly and responsibly, and in giving consent to property schemes meeting the agreed criteria.
7. Encourage Circuit Treasurers to maintain a designated Manse Fund Account, incorporated within the General Fund, and to set aside regular appropriate annual sums to provide a financial resource out of which to fund ongoing replacement, maintenance, repair and decoration.

Guidance on an appropriate amount will be provided on request to the District Property Secretary or District Treasurer.

8. Support churches and Circuits exploring decisions to close churches for worship and to enable them, through a decision of the District Policy Committee and Synod, to dispose of the premises in accordance with Standing Orders.
9. To support Circuits wishing to purchase a new manse and, after Circuit approval, to seek guidance and consent from the District Policy Committee in order to avoid the purchase of an inappropriate property.

ECUMENICAL CO-OPERATION

The District Policy Committee commits itself to working in an ecumenical context and engaging in full consultation with our ecumenical partners to enable the South-East District, its Circuits and local churches to engage with the *Priorities for the Methodist Church* and to regroup and reorganise in ways that will make them more effective in mission.

Existing and proposed church building of partner churches will be noted, particularly with a view to ecumenical co-operation or the formation of Local Ecumenical Partnerships or sharing schemes.

DISTRICT MANSE VISITORS

The ongoing care of manses is a matter of partnership between the occupants and the Circuit Stewards. Such care should involve an annual inspection by the Circuit in order to complete the annual property schedules.

The District Policy Committee will appoint a panel of Manse Visitors sufficient to ensure that each manse is visited by two members together from the panel every five years or earlier if a manse changes occupancy. Half of the manse visitors should be women wherever possible.

The Manse Visitors shall complete Schedule J, supplied by the Connexional Property Office, which includes recommendations as to repair and replacement. A copy shall be handed to the Circuit Property Steward, Superintendent Minister, occupant of the manse and the District Property Secretary. The District Property Secretary will liaise with the Circuit Property Steward as to the time-scale for the completion of repairs or replacement.

Training will be provided for Manse Visitors to ensure common standards across the District.

The District Property Secretary will keep a register of properties visited, when repairs/replacements were completed, and the approximate date of the next five-year visit.

Any Circuit seeking a Presbyterian or Deacon through the stationing process must demonstrate that they have funds available to properly house the Presbyterian/Deacon and their family, and the matter of a manse being of the required standard can be raised during the consultation period.

GUIDELINES FOR DISTRICT CONSENT OF PROPERTY PROJECTS

The criteria for property projects are as follows:

1. Is the property part of a clear strategy directed towards fulfilling God's mission in that locality and the wider mission of the District?
2. Are sufficient funds available for the project?
3. If not immediately available from existing funds or confirmed grants, where will the funds emerge from and when?
4. Whether the Managing Trustees have considered all the pertinent issues and taken the necessary steps to act properly and prudently (in terms of law, Charity Commission requirements, Model Trusts, Standing Orders, Technical Matters, etc.)

PROPERTY CONSENTS PROCESS

The 2007 Conference affirmed developments in procedures to deal with property consents that were reported to it and directed the Methodist Council to approve the further work on them that is required. Since Conference, detailed policies to implement the principles of these procedures (including a new electronic process for dealing with proposals for which consent is requested) are being tested, and a Connexional Policy in line with Conference decisions will be forthcoming shortly.

The Consents Policy will be progressively rolled out to Districts to an agreed timetable. Consent implies that the Managing Trustees who propose to undertake property work will have the final responsibility for ensuring that it is properly planned, funded, managed and enacted.

Ernest Jones
District Property Secretary
March 2009