



The  
United  
Reformed  
Church

# (Northern Province) Trust Limited Manse Subcommittee

## Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	<b>Peter Matthew</b> Convenor
<b>Responsibilities</b>	Oversees and monitors the good stewardship of manses.
<b>Action required</b>	Resolution to accept this report's recommendations.

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Strategic review of manses.
<b>Main points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are more manses than needed, and surplus properties should be sold.</li> <li>• Some churches are dependent on rental income, and financial compensation should be given.</li> <li>• There has been consultation with other synods, with churches, and with ministers.</li> <li>• Management of insurance and statutory inspections could be centralised.</li> <li>• Manses should be maintained to a good standard, with a local representative inspecting annually.</li> <li>• Grants should be offered for sustainability initiatives and minor repairs.</li> </ul>
<b>Other relevant information</b>	'Guidelines and Procedures for the Care of Manses', 19 March, 2011; 'Patterns of Ministry – A way ahead to 2025', 16 October 2021.

### *Introduction*

[Resolution 1]

The Manse Subcommittee on 8 January 2021 proposed a strategic review of manse accommodation throughout the synod and this was accepted by the Trust board on 2 February, 2021.

Since then, the Manse Subcommittee has considered the issue at its regular meetings and has also held several special meetings.

Information was sought from other synods on their manse policies and was considered in detail. Church secretaries were invited to submit comments, as were serving ministers (including CRCWMs).

### *Purpose of the Review*

There are currently well over twice as many manses as are likely to be required to house ministers following the adoption in March, 2022, of the proposals for 'Patterns of Ministry – A way ahead to 2025'.

The purpose of the review is therefore to consider how best to achieve a reduction in the number of manses and manage their provision and maintenance in the coming years and, taking into account the financial effects on local churches and the financial resources of synod, to make appropriate recommendations to the Trust board and synod.

### *Background*

Houses for ministers, caretakers and other church workers are held under the same trusts, set out in Part II of the second schedule to the United Reformed Church Act 1972. This review refers only to manses.

The Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration lays down a responsibility on the local church to provide manse accommodation for the minister, or a housing allowance where the minister makes their own arrangements. Assembly has set out guidelines on manses in Appendix D of that document, and recognises that it is important to offer some flexibility to take account of local circumstances.

There are currently **35** manses within the synod, whereas synod is scoped for **18** stipendiary ministers, although only **11** are currently in residence. The distribution of manses is historical, and does not relate to current and future patterns of ministry. A document illustrating the current manse distribution is attached as Appendix A.

### *Summary of Responses from Other Synods*

Responses were received from Southern, Mersey, Wales and Thames North Synods. That from Southern, which manages manses centrally, was a copy of their manse policy, a very lengthy and detailed document, very prescriptive. Mersey forwarded their manse policy, adopted in 2018, which is a short and simple document. They have produced a manse handbook which has been replicated in Thames North, an idea worthy of consideration.

Several synods have moved to managing manses centrally, for example Mersey, where the responsibility for management and maintenance is delegated to their Resources Committee and carried out by their Property Officer. Minor day-to-day repairs up to a value of £500 per annum are, however, left to the local church. The synod organises and pays for a block insurance policy, annual gas safety check and boiler check, and five-yearly test of the fixed wire electrical installation.

### *Responses from Churches and Ministers*

Responses were received from a reasonable number of churches and in several cases where manses are let, there is a dependence on the income for general

church purposes once manse maintenance budgeted costs are met. It should be noted that a number of our churches have 'investment' properties which are not part of this review. There are also at least two situations where the 'manse' should probably not be regarded as such, rather as a church property. The centralisation of statutory inspections was favoured by some, whereas others were happy to continue to be responsible. Some rural churches favoured encouragement of local tradespeople for maintenance. In the majority of cases where manses are let, agents are used to secure and manage lettings and, in some cases, to take responsibility for arranging repairs.

The single response from a minister was comprehensive and revealing, and stemmed from a variety of experiences in different synods, some good, some less so. Reference was made to the differing attitudes of those responsible for managing the manse, some requiring to be consulted on anything to do with the manse, others expecting minor jobs to be done without such reference. This had led to not always feeling comfortable in the manse, with minor repairs not being carried out. The need for a good relationship with whoever has responsibility for the manse was stressed. It was noted that none of the manses occupied had fully fitted the denominational guidelines, but that it should not always be expected and flexibility was required. Experience had shown that where synods took over the management of manses from local churches, the situation had improved immediately.

### *The Issues and Challenges*

- There exist many more manses than are required, or likely to be required to house ministers, and it is recognised that several existing manses are not suitable for housing ministers.
- Many churches depend on surplus income from manses which are let to meet general church expenses, and the challenge is to reduce an unnecessarily large property portfolio without financially disadvantaging the associated church.
- Impending regulations will make it illegal to enter new tenancies unless the property has an energy performance certificate (EPC) rating of 'C' or higher, and the cost of upgrading is likely to be significant.
- The inability of some churches to properly manage manses, in particular the regular inspections of gas and electricity installations, and asbestos management.
- The inability of the Trust to centrally manage manse provision without additional staff having property experience.
- The reluctance of some ministers to press for repairs and improvements where the finances of the local church are under pressure.
- Doubts that the current practice of voluntary quinquennial inspections by Manse Subcommittee members can continue.
- The desirability for discussion between churches, Manse Subcommittee and Pastoral Committee whenever a manse becomes vacant.

## *Conclusions*

The ability of local churches, or groupings of churches, to manage their manse, or manses, varies widely across the synod. In general, the larger congregations are able to appoint people to oversee repairs, improvements and statutory inspections. However, some of the smaller congregations find this an increasing burden, not only in terms of personnel but also in respect of finance.

Without an increase in staff with property expertise, synod could not effectively manage the current number of manses centrally. Should it be possible to reduce the number to only those required to house ministers, centralisation of management could be reconsidered. However, it may be desirable, and possible, to centralise statutory inspections to ensure legal compliance.

Given the large number of manses which are let, a major issue in the near future will be ensuring that properties have an EPC rating of 'C' or above, without which new letting will be illegal. This may only be achievable at considerable expense and early disposal may be more sensible.

The strength of synod's Manse Fund provides an opportunity to both assist churches facing a loss of income from let manses which are sold, and to adopt a more flexible approach to the sale and purchase of manses to better suit the new groupings of churches currently envisaged. Churches need to be assured that Synod will fund the purchase of a new manse where appropriate, although appreciating that the need to change manse each time a minister is called should be avoided as far as possible. Financial assistance with sustainability initiatives should also be possible.

The development of good, sensitive, relationships between ministers and those given responsibility by local churches to oversee manses is to be encouraged, to overcome any reluctance of ministers to seek repairs and improvements and to ensure proper maintenance of these property assets.

The current policy of quinquennial inspections of manses should continue, but consideration should be given to the employment of chartered surveyors to replace the use of volunteers from Manse Subcommittee.

## *Recommendations*

Note that these recommendations relate only to United Reformed Church manses, not to those belonging to other denominations.

- a) Synod affirms that its aim is to ensure that all in stipendiary ministry are accommodated in appropriate properties, up to an agreed standard taking into account national guidelines, from the resources of the Manse Fund. If a pastorate needs a manse, it would be provided. The location of a manse is for the convenience of the pastorate and would be agreed by all churches in the pastorate.
- b) Manses will not normally be held as investment vehicles, and the number of manses will be reduced as soon as possible, with redundant manses being sold and the proceeds being distributed in accordance with synod policy on completion. To that end, early discussions will be held with each pastorate,

involving Pastoral Committee and Synod Executive, as appropriate. Such discussions will also be required on each occasion that a manse becomes vacant.

- c) The Trust will not centralise the management of manses but, to ensure compliance, will organise and bear the cost of all statutory inspections. It will remain the responsibility of occupants to regularly test carbon monoxide and smoke alarms.
- d) Following the recent decision to offer 100% grants for the provision, or improvement, to current standards of loft insulation in manses occupied by ministers, the offer will be extended to sustainability initiatives such as the installation of solar panels and/or electric vehicle charging points.
- e) The Trust requires that it be notified by each pastorate of the details of the person responsible for its manse, who will be expected to annually inspect the manse and establish regular contact with the minister, organising repairs or improvements as necessary.
- f) The Trust offers an annual grant of up to £1,000 to each pastorate for minor repairs and maintenance of a manse whilst occupied by a minister, paid on receipt of copy invoices.
- g) The Trust will continue to organise quinquennial inspections of manses, possibly using chartered surveyors to carry out such inspections along the lines of a homebuyer's report.
- h) The Trust will arrange, and cover the cost of, a block policy of insurance for manses, building on its existing policy for synod properties.
- i) An agreement will be required where there are additional occupants of a manse, and/or where there is business use of the manse.
- j) The Trust will purchase new manses as synod properties.
- k) A framework for sharing agreements will be established between churches within groupings for the management of the manses.

The members of Manse Subcommittee, Jane Tomlin, Alan Woodhall, John Drew, Bill Hopper and Peter Matthew (Convenor) acknowledge with thanks all who have contributed to this review and, in particular, our Trust Officer, Andrew Atkinson, for his guidance and assistance.

**Resolution:**

- 1. Synod accepts the recommendations of the strategic review of manses.**

## APPENDIX A

### Current Manse Distribution

On 19 March 2022, Synod meeting adopted the Pastoral Committee's proposals for 'Patterns of Ministry – A way ahead to 2025'. The table below matches current manse provision to current and forecast requirements (as at 1 August, 2022, for stipendiary Ministers of Word & Sacraments and Church-Related Community Work Ministers). The groupings listed below are the ones given in that document.

<b>Grouping</b>	<b>Current Scoping</b>	<b>Forecast Scoping</b>	<b>Manses</b>
North and Mid Northumberland	4	2	6
South East Northumberland (1)	1	1	1
South East Northumberland (2)	1	1	2
Tyne Valley	1	1	3
Coast	2	1	2
Newcastle (East)	1	1	3
Newcastle North West and Central	1	1	3
Gosforth	1	1	1
South Tyneside and Sunderland	2	2	5
Durham and Gateshead	1	1	4
Teesside	2	2	3
Tees and Swale	1	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>35</b>

### Manse Locations

Those occupied by serving URC ministers are indicated thus: (M).

North and Mid Northumberland	Holy Island (M) Wooler (M) Alnwick (M) Felton (M)
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	Glanton Rothbury
South East Northumberland (1)	Blyth
South East Northumberland (2)	Morpeth (M) Widdrington
Tyne Valley	Horsley Wideopen Ponteland
Coast	Whitley Bay North Shields (M)
Newcastle (East)	West Denton Heaton (M) High Heaton
Newcastle North West and Central	Kenton Jesmond Fenham (M)
Gosforth	Gosforth (M)
South Tyneside and Sunderland	South Shields Roker (M) Sunderland Sunderland Sunderland
Durham and Gateshead	Durham Stanley Gateshead Gateshead (M)
Teesside	Stockton Stockton Billingham (M)
Tees and Swale	Northallerton Keld