

17. Methodist Ministers' Housing Society

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1. Introduction

The Methodist Ministers' Housing Society's story is one of extraordinary generosity and far-reaching vision. The Society was formed in 1948 following the gift of a house, buildings and land in Barrow on Trent, Derbyshire. Since that time, it has been the beneficiary of many gifts from individuals, churches and organisations enabling it to help thousands of Methodist presbyters and deacons of limited means by providing them with houses in their retirement. The equity sharing scheme introduced in the 1980s, whereby ministers could have an equity interest in the houses provided, extended its mission very effectively.

2. Our situation today

The Society wishes to expand its services. A new strategic plan, put together after much prayer, discussion and research, will be launched in May of this year and will cover the period 2017 to 2022. The Society recognises that ministry is changing and in response, it too must change. It will continue to provide quality homes at a rent that balances affordability for ministers with the financial stability of the Society but it will also offer financial options to ministers who own their own homes or who have the ability to buy their own home in readiness for retirement. Initially, it will set up a small scheme whereby it will take an equity share in a minister's house. Additionally, it will expand on the well-being support presently given to ministers, with a particular focus on helping in the important areas of mobility and independence.

3. Housing provision in 2015/16

In addition to caring for those already housed by the Society, 10 new ministerial residents were accepted from those who were granted permission to retire by the Conference. Six of them were 'housed' during the year to 31 August 2016 with the remainder 'housed' in the months following. Of those 10, two retired for medical reasons and one was a widowed spouse. The Society also housed eight further applicants who had become supernumeraries in earlier years and it permitted the transfer of six applicants from amongst its existing ministerial residents to housing better suited to their needs.

The Society continues to promote use of its own portfolio of properties but it will purchase properties for those who have medical or other valid reasons for requiring a property of a certain type in a particular area.

At 31 August 2016, the Society had 931 properties; 793 occupied by presbyters and deacons and their spouses, or widows/widowers, 101 let to market tenants and 37 empty, mainly pending refurbishment or decisions on sales or letting. It is important to report that all of the properties let on the open market remain available at all times to ministers.

4. Rent and finances

The Society was able to hold the annual increase in rent for ministerial tenants to the modest level of 1.1% and accordingly, for 2015/16 the Society's rent was £3,012. The increase matched the percentage increase in the Retail Price Index (RPI) in January 2015 compared with the previous year. The annual rent is significantly lower than average market rents in the UK.

In the year to 31 August 2016, rental income from ministerial tenants amounted to £2.415 million. A further £0.804 million of income was generated from market-rate tenants and interest on deposits. When all other income related to legacies, bequests, donations and profits on the sale of properties was accounted for, the Society achieved a substantial surplus in the year to 31 August 2016. Surpluses in any given year are put to good use in subsequent years and form an important enabling part of strategic planning. The Society's total funds were £78.049 million; Board members and staff are conscious of their stewardship responsibilities in relation to all the Society's assets. The Society's financial statements for 2015/16 are available for examination on its website.

5. Decent Homes Programme

The Society remains committed to the Decent Homes Programme. In the year to August 2016, 69 kitchens were replaced, 50 bathrooms were refurbished, 141 boilers were replaced, 103 windows/doors were replaced, 17 driveways were improved and 20 houses were rewired.

The programme continues in 2016/17 with a budget of £1.128 million allocated to it.

6. Repairs and maintenance

In 2013, the Society entered into a three-year contract with British Gas for the repair and maintenance of gas and electrical installations for all its properties in England, Scotland and Wales. This contract with British Gas ended on 31 August 2016 and a five-year extension was negotiated under a Memorandum of Understanding. Annual contracts will be signed by the Society and British Gas and there is the ability to break the arrangement at the end of any given year. The operational performance of our contractors is being monitored under key performance indicators agreed by the Board.

7. Board membership

Earlier this year, the Society welcomed Ms Catherine Hastings, the Revd Alan Taylor, the Revd Glyn Lister, the Revd Charles New, Mr Paul Haslam and Mr Alex Campbell as new Board members.

The Society said goodbye to Mrs Ann Brook, the Revd Dr John Harrod and Dr John Lander. In her Report for the Society's AGM, the Society's new Chair, Mrs Debbie Faulkner, acknowledged their significant contributions to the Society whilst they served on the Board.

The present 12 Board members have a wealth of experience and knowledge, all of which will be needed as the new strategy for 2017-2022 is rolled out. The governance review undertaken in 2016 was very helpful and the Board has already acted on most of its recommendations.

8. Staff

The staff team is continuing to develop a good balance between its skills, abilities and aspirations. Team members have a clear understanding of the role they each play in achieving overall objectives. Openness and co-operation are encouraged, as is a culture of learning and development.

The staff team of 11 will shortly welcome two new members who will add to the team's capability and capacity.

The Senior Management Team is committed to providing excellent leadership and management at every level.

9. Conclusion

The Society has adopted Acts 4:34 as its Vision Statement under its new strategy: "...there was not a needy person among them". During the early stages of life in the Christian Church, the

day-to-day needs of each person were met by the generosity of members of the community. It is our privilege as a Society, Board and staff team alike, to meet the housing and housing-related needs of retired ministers of limited means, and their spouses, and their widows or widowers, and to offer support with their well-being. We can do so because of the wonderful generosity of members of the Methodist community who were faithful stewards of God's good gifts to them.

*****RESOLUTION**

17/1. The Conference received the Report.