

22. Methodist Ministers' Housing Society

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1. Introduction

The Methodist Ministers' Housing Society's story continues to be one of extraordinary big-heartedness and far-reaching vision. 1948 was special. This was when the Society was formed and it follows that this year, we are celebrating our 70th anniversary. We have a number of exciting things planned – a special edition of our newsletter *Roof'n'Roots* and the commissioning of a clock to name but two.

Since our early days, we have helped thousands of retired Methodist ministers and their families by providing them with houses in their retirement. We are blessed with significant capital assets and we wish to continue using them well.

2. Our situation today

We know that Christian ministry is changing, so too life in 21st-century Britain, and we recognise the need for significant change ourselves in response to the many consequential challenges we face. The Society is expanding its services. A new strategic plan for 2017-2022, put together after much prayer, discussion and research, was launched in September 2017. We are continuing to provide quality homes at a rent that balances affordability for ministers with the financial stability of the Society. We are also offering financial options to ministers who own their own homes or who have the ability to buy their own home in readiness for retirement. We have set up a small scheme whereby we can take an equity share in a minister's house. Additionally, we are expanding the well-being support presently given to ministers, with a particular focus on helping them remain mobile and independent for as long as possible. Our new strategic plan gives us the scope to consider other options in pursuit of our vision and in fulfilment of our mission.

3. Housing provision from September 2016 to August 2017

In addition to caring for those already housed by the Society, 16 new ministerial residents were accepted from those who were granted permission to become supernumerary by the Conference. Thirteen of them were 'housed' during the year to 31 August 2017 with the remainder 'housed' in the months following. Of those 16, one retired for medical reasons. The Society also housed 2 further applicants who had become supernumeraries in earlier years and it permitted the transfer of 14 applicants from amongst its existing ministerial residents, to housing more suitable to their needs.

The Society continues to promote the use of its own portfolio of properties, for reasons of good stewardship, 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.

As at 31 August 2017, the Society had 932 properties; 777 occupied by presbyters and deacons and their spouses, or widows/widowers, 118 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. The revenue generated from our market rental portfolio forms an important income stream.

4. Rent and finances for 2016-17

The Society was able to hold the annual increase in rent for ministerial residents to the modest level of 1.3% and accordingly the Society's rent was £3,048. This increase matched the percentage increase in the Retail Price Increase (RPI) in January 2016 compared with the previous year. The annual rent is significantly lower than average market rents in the UK.

In the year to 31 August 2017, rental income from ministerial residents amounted to £2.392million. A further £0.983million 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 surplus in the year to 31 August 2017. 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 £82.929million; Board members and staff are conscious of their stewardship responsibilities in relation to all the Society's assets. The Society's financial statements for 2016-17 are available for examination on our website.

5. Decent Homes Programme

The Society remains committed to the Decent Homes Programme. In the year to August 2017, £189K was spent on kitchen replacements, £387K on bathroom refurbishments, £195K on boiler replacements, £134K on new windows/doors replacements, £140K on driveway improvements and £66K on rewiring.

The programme continues in 2017-18 with a budget of £1.032 million allocated to it.

6. Repairs and maintenance

Minor repairs are undertaken by local contractors in close consultation with ministerial residents and in accordance with the Society's policies. 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 but a five-year extension was negotiated under a Memorandum of Understanding. Annual contracts are signed 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 KPIs agreed by the Board.

7. Board membership

At present, the Board has nine members who offer their experience and knowledge in pursuing good governance outcomes for the Society. The Society experienced the death of its Chair, Debbie Faulkner, in September 2017 and then the death of Board member, the Revd Alan Ashton, in December 2017. Each death had a profound effect on many people connected to the Society. We thank God for their lives and, in particular, for their contributions to the well-being of the Society.

8. Staff

The staff team, 13 strong at present, is well equipped to serve the best interests of the Society's beneficiaries. The Senior Management Team is committed to providing excellent leadership and management at every level. Day-to-day work is aligned to the core values of the Society, which are stated simply as follows:

"We have a Christian distinctiveness of which we are proud and it underpins who we are and what we do. Our concern is to show high standards of care in all we do and to be professional both as individuals and as an organisation."

9. Conclusion

The Society has Acts 4:34 as its vision statement: ‘...there was not a single person in need among them’. We are striving to reach that ideal. It is our privilege as a Society to be able to fulfil our mission of meeting 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 wellbeing. We can do this because of the amazing generosity of members of the Methodist community who have supported the Society from its early days to this day. In this our 70th anniversary year, we are again reminded of the wonderful provision and care of God, acting through his faithful people.

*****RESOLUTION**

22/1. The Conference received the Report.