

**OVERSIGHT OF CHURCH BUILDINGS**  
(Including Church Halls, Sunday Schools, Manses, Caretakers' Houses, etc.)

**GUIDANCE FOR CHURCH ELDERS**

While the church is a group of people and not a building, it is a fact that most of our churches are owners, in trust, of buildings. It is a **duty** of the Elders Meeting to ensure that the buildings entrusted to their care are maintained in a way that ensures the health and safety as well as the comfort and convenience of all who use them. Many churches are seeing the benefits of opening their buildings to the community but that brings with it increasing wear and tear on the fabric and increasing responsibilities for health and safety.

The notes which follow try to summarise advice concerning the regular checks that must be made, including the Synod's Building Survey Scheme. It is suggested that this Guidance Note is inserted at the front of the Buildings Record Book and referred to at least once a year. In particular, it is considered **essential** that Elders review all matters in Sections A and B below at least once a year.

Note: Reference to sections of "the Property Handbook" refer to the PLATO Property Handbook which is available on the URC website or by a link from the Property Information page on the Synod website. See either: [http://www.urch.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/plato/plato](http://www.urch.org.uk/what_we_do/plato/plato) or <http://www.urchyorkshire.org.uk/ca.html>

## **A Routine Checks by Church Members**

### **General**

Section 811 of the Property Handbook contains information about essential checks on small electrical appliances and on areas where asbestos may be present and advice on routine maintenance, including a checklist for a regular "walk round" inspection of the premises. This should be done on all buildings for which you are responsible including the manse whether occupied by your minister or let to tenants in a vacancy.

The church should maintain a **Buildings Record Book** – a ring binder is ideal – in which a record of all work done is kept together with copies of reports, records of "walk round" inspections, and so on.

### **Fire Prevention**

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 replaced all previous fire regulations and made significant changes to the way that fire safety is managed in premises. In particular, "fire certificates" are no longer issued and responsibility for ensuring compliance with the regulations lies with a specific individual – the "responsible person."

It is now a **requirement that a fire risk assessment must be carried out and recorded and that it be regularly reviewed**. This will apply to **all** buildings, including the Manse. A copy of that assessment should be kept in your Buildings Record Book and **must** be regularly reviewed. Further information can be found at Section 251 of the Property Handbook and in the Government booklet *A Short Guide to Making your Premises Safe from Fire*, copies of which were sent to all churches in the Synod. See the Synod website or that of the HSE for further details. If the church holds a Premises Licence then the relevant regulations must be followed. (See section 281 of the Property Handbook)

## **Asbestos**

The Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002 (CAWR) came into force in May 2004 and from that date **persons who control or manage non-domestic buildings have specific duties**. These regulations apply to Churches, Halls and some other properties owned by churches and their Trustees and are applicable whether workers are paid or volunteers. The public must also be safeguarded. The duties are well defined in 'A short guide to managing asbestos in premises', copies of which were sent to all churches and which can be viewed or downloaded from the HSE web site. A copy of the asbestos management report should be kept in your Buildings Record Book and **must** be regularly reviewed.

## **B Essential Regular Inspections by Professionally Qualified Personnel**

### **Electrical Installation**

The Elders should ensure that a qualified person inspects and tests any **electrical** installation every **five years**. A "Resistance and Earth Continuity Test" should be obtained on all circuits and the engineer's test report should be retained in the Buildings Record Book.

### **Lightning Conductor**

A competent electrical engineer should test any lightning conductor every five years in accordance with the current British Standard Code of Practice and the record of the test results and conditions should be recorded in the Buildings Record Book.

### **Gas Appliances and Central Heating**

A qualified engineer should make a proper examination and test of the heating apparatus, each summer before the heating season begins. The Church could consider arranging an inspection and maintenance contract. All gas appliances should be inspected by a Gas Safe registered engineer. Copies of reports should be retained in the Buildings Record Book.

### **Organ**

Relevant specialists should carry out regular inspections and copies of any reports should be retained in the Buildings Record Book.

## **C Building Survey Scheme**

In addition to the above the Synod organises and supports a building survey scheme in which an architect or surveyor of the local church's choice inspects all churches, halls etc every five years. The programme was agreed with Districts at the start of the scheme but it is administered from the Synod Office. All surveyors are expected to report in a standard format.

The objective of the survey is to ensure the early detection of deterioration and defects so that prompt action can be taken and unnecessary (and perhaps crippling) expenses avoided. Property is an asset of the Church and it is important that all property is maintained in a good state of repair, even when disposal is contemplated.

The notes that follow try to set out how the scheme works and what happens when your church is due to be inspected.

### Arranging the inspection

- 1 When a survey is due, the Trust and Property Secretary will provide the church with draft letters and a copy of the required **Report Format and Content** to send to prospective surveyors. Churches will also receive a **List of Surveyors**. This list mostly comprises surveyors used by churches within the Synod where the churches have been happy with the service provided. Surveyors are required to hold current professional indemnity insurance cover that specifically includes the service(s) being offered to Churches, and to exercise due skill and care in conformity with good professional standards. A church can appoint a surveyor who is not on the list provided that they are suitably qualified, are willing to do the work in accordance with the Scheme, and carry appropriate indemnity insurance.
- 2 The Church should decide which firms it wishes to invite to tender for the survey. These firms should be contacted direct by the Church and asked to provide estimates for the professional fees involved. This **must** include the supply of 2 copies of the report (3 if a Listed Building) and travel or any other cost such as hire of special equipment for access. Churches are asked to ensure, as a matter of courtesy, that all tenders submitted are properly acknowledged and it is helpful if you advise the Trust and Property Secretary of the firm selected and the date that the report should be available. Likewise the Trust and Property Secretary should be advised if you have any problems finding a surveyor.
- 3 In inviting and responding to invitations to tender for surveys you must agree any special requirements as to access and the provision of suitable, and where appropriate, lightweight ladders. The person carrying out the inspection **MUST be able to access ALL parts of the building including under-floor and roof spaces** if at all possible. (See also 7 below.) The surveyor should also be prepared, with reasonable notice, to attend an Elders or Church Meeting to explain the report if necessary. If there are particular issues then a member of the Synod's Property Committee may be able to attend to support the church members.

### Carrying out the inspection

- 4 Elders should be prepared to provide the surveyor with the following: information about any rights of way, light or air; details of any known building defects or problems; details of any damage during the last five years, including damage from storms, vandalism or fire, which might have been repaired or covered over; any plans of the property you have available. You should also provide a copy of the last survey report, and have the Buildings Record Book available. The more help that can be given to the surveyor, the quicker the survey can be completed, the more reliable will be the report, and the lower the costs in the long run.
- 5 The Church must arrange for an **informed** representative to attend to ensure **full** access and provide the information mentioned above. **ALL necessary** keys and information on access points, meter and manhole positions should be available together with ladders to reach gutter/eaves level and access hatches, and help on hand to move the ladder (in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974). Arrangements should be made with the surveyor as to the degree of attendance of the Church representative(s) considered necessary, and responsibility for keys and the security of the premises on conclusion of the survey.
- 6 The inspection should include **all** buildings including Manse, Caretaker's house etc. (For manses and other residential properties a survey is normally only required every ten years but any queries in this regard should be discussed with the Synod Office). In the case of an LEP only those buildings in URC ownership are to be included.

- 7 The inspection must cover **ALL** areas accessible from ground level and ladders, **together with** readily accessible roof areas, galleries, under-floor areas and cellars and should include moisture meter information or readings. Where there are particularly high roofs (say over 9m to gutter level) a scaffold tower or other means of access should have been discussed with the surveyor in advance and appropriate equipment arranged. Binoculars may be used for inspection of spires, tall towers or gables, but if used, then the report will identify the specific areas and features involved.

### **The Report**

- 8 The report should include all aspects of the buildings, in line with the **Report Content and Format**. Specifically it should refer to any areas which have not, or could not, be inspected. If it is considered by the surveyor that it is important that any such areas be inspected or that further exploratory work is required this should be indicated and reasons given. Some indication should be given of what additional costs might be involved, including builders work if appropriate.
- 9 Sketches, proportionally correct although not measured drawings, indicating the general layout may be prepared by the surveyor and included with - and annotated to cross-refer to - the text of the report. Also it would be helpful if an Ordnance Survey extract site plan were incorporated in the report.
- 10 Photographs may be provided by the surveyor and are helpful to clarify the report and to establish the current state of specific conditions/defects for monitoring purposes.
- 11 An **ESSENTIAL** requirement of the report is that it details the surveyor's recommendation of works to be undertaken, scheduled according to their priority as either needed urgently, needed within the next two and a half years, or needed within the next five years. Ideally a guide to cost should be given. The report will also detail any further investigations required such as a specialist timber inspection or a structural engineer's report. If the report does not contain this summary - or any other information - the church **must** go back to the surveyor and request it. The surveyor's account should not be paid unless you are satisfied that he has provided what was agreed.
- 13 The surveyor will not provide a specification covering the repair of defects unless the Church subsequently requests this. Any additional fees involved are payable by the Church and are not part of the Scheme. It is the duty of the Elders as the Trustees to seek further advice and take necessary decisions as part of their normal responsibility for the care, maintenance, preservation and insurance of the building, fabric and contents.

### **After the inspection**

- 14 A copy of the report should be sent to the Synod Office as soon as it is received. Additionally if any of your buildings are Listed, a copy of the report on those buildings must be sent to the convener of the Listed Buildings Advisory Committee.
- 15 When received, a **copy** of the **fee account** should also be sent to the Synod Office who will, as quickly as possible, forward a cheque to the Church for **25%** of the amount involved. The Church is responsible for the payment of the account in full to the Surveyor. N.B. This grant will not be paid until a copy of the report (in the required format) has been received at the Synod Office and the grant does not cover the cost of inspections in section B above (page 2) but may be extended to include the cost of some essential specialist investigations arising from the surveyor's initial inspection. If in doubt, please check with the Synod Office in advance.

## **D Repairs and maintenance work**

Elders are reminded of that churches need to obtain formal approval of Synod to major repair schemes, alterations, extensions and demolition work. (See YOR02 – Notes for Guidance when Considering Works to Church Property.) Please note that this would include a scheme of repairs following an inspection if the total cost is in excess of £10,000.

It is wise to ensure that any major work is undertaken under the guidance of a suitably qualified person who can prepare a schedule of works, advise on suitable contractors and oversee the tendering process. The surveyor involved in the survey may be willing to undertake such work but the church is free to appoint someone else. Any such appointments are a charge on the church and are not covered by the survey scheme.

Minor and routine work can be carried out without seeking permission, but please remember that the surveyor's summary of work required does not in itself constitute a "Schedule of Works".

If a church has any queries or wishes advice about any work whether major or minor, then members of the Synod Property Committee are available – and happy - to advise and assist. Please contact the Trust and Property Secretary in the first instance.

## **E Insurance**

Churches are reminded that insurance cover should be index-linked so that adequate cover is maintained against inflation of building costs. It is, of course, important to ensure that the basic sum insured is adequate at inception of index-linking. The church's insurer will offer guidance as to the appropriate level of cover or alternatively a professional valuation should be made.

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