

# QUIRKE'S ALMSHOUSE CHARITY RESIDENTS HANDBOOK

(It is important that all Residents read and agree to the terms of this Handbook as well as those contained in their Letter of Appointment).



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## Section 1 – Introduction

### Welcome

The Quirke's Almshouse Charity would like to extend a very warm welcome to you as a new resident. We hope that you will settle in quickly and be very happy here. This handbook sets out useful information about the charity and its general administration and management. It also explains your responsibilities as a resident. Please do not hesitate to speak to the clerk/trustees if you need further information on any matters.

Please note that the conditions stated in this handbook form part of your contract with the charity and supplement the rules and regulations given in your Letter of Appointment which you signed when you accepted your appointment. It may be necessary to amend these rules and regulations from time to time, but any changes will be discussed with residents beforehand when you will be given the opportunity to express any views or concerns.

The almshouse appointed to you is your home, and every effort will be made to help you remain independent, free to choose your own lifestyle, and able to benefit from the enjoyment and dignity that almshouse living provides. We are sure you will appreciate the importance of everyone in the almshouse community respecting the wishes of other residents and being able to benefit from the quiet enjoyment of their home.

The trustees have tried to minimise these rules and regulations which have been designed for the benefit of all residents and to ensure the efficient management of the charity.

Once again, a very warm welcome.

#### **Clerk: Jo Chapman**

Registered office address:

Based at Minehead Town Council office, 3 Summerland Road, Minehead, TA24 5BP

**Tel Contact No: 01643 707213**

#### **Day to Day Property Management Company**

Greenslade, Taylor, Hunt (GTH), 8 The Parade, Minehead TA24 5UF

Any maintenance issues, please report them on **01823 348880**

**or email: maintenance@gth.net**

Office hours are 09.00 – 17.30 Monday to Friday and 09.00 – 13.00 Saturday.

Any urgent or emergency matters outside these hours which cannot wait until the next working day – please refer to the list of preferred contractors and agencies at the end of this handbook. **If the matter is deemed non-urgent, you may be liable to pay costs.**

## **Section 2 – History, Governance and Management**

### **Historical Note**

The Quirke's Almshouses situated in Market House Lane, Minehead were built in 1630 by mariner Robert Quirke. Legend has it that during a terrible storm he prayed to be saved, promising to build houses for the poor if he survived!

### **Constitution**

The charity is a registered charity, number 203647 governed by a Charity Commission Scheme dated 03 October 1960.

### **Management**

The charity is governed by a board of volunteer trustees with a clerk for the administration.

Day-to-day management of the properties and collection of contributions is carried out by the Trustees' contracted property management company.

### **The Almshouses**

The charity manages six unfurnished cottages for the benefit of in need residents of Minehead and Selworthy & Minehead Without.

The principle behind everything that the charity does is that residents should enjoy an independent lifestyle and the freedom to come and go as they please while living in comfortable and secure accommodation. Above all, the charity respects residents' privacy.

Residents may expect to continue in occupation as long as they need the accommodation providing, they continue to qualify as a beneficiary, are able to look after themselves, abide by the regulations as laid out in the Letter of Appointment and the Residents Handbook, and their appointment as a beneficiary is not set aside.

## **Section 3 – Terms of Occupancy**

### **Letter of Appointment**

Your Letter of Appointment, of which you have a copy, is personal to you and explains that you occupy the almshouse as a beneficiary of the charity. This means that neither you nor any relation or guest of yours is a tenant with the security of tenure that a tenancy offers. No other person is allowed to live at the property unless they have formally applied to the charity and been granted beneficiary status in their own right and you have been jointly allocated the same dwelling.

In exceptional circumstances the trustees could ask you to find alternative accommodation and leave the almshouse (setting aside your appointment). In practice, this occurs very rarely when trustees believe that they have no alternative.

Examples of such circumstances are if:

- A resident is no longer able to look after themselves safely or is not able to live independently.
- The resident consistently fails to pay weekly maintenance contributions (WMC) without good reason.
- The behaviour of the resident is deemed to be unreasonable and anti-social, either in respect of other residents, trustees, or members of staff.
- The resident's circumstances change significantly to the extent that they no longer qualify to live in the almshouses as a beneficiary.
- The resident fails to comply with the rules and regulations made by the charity.
- It is proven that the resident provided untrue or misleading answers or information in his/her application to be appointed a beneficiary of the charity.

It is a condition of occupancy that residents provide the charity with accurate and complete information of their financial circumstances and that residents inform the charity if their circumstances change. The charity may review residents' financial circumstances from time to time. However, residents are assured that only in the most unusual circumstances would this lead to someone being asked to leave.

The charity may set aside an appointment as a last resort after every reasonable effort has been made to resolve the issues. If, having been asked to leave, a resident felt aggrieved, they have the right to have their case heard in the county court.

### **Weekly Maintenance Contribution (WMC)**

Weekly maintenance contributions are payable in advance on the first of each month by standing order. If you are experiencing difficulties in paying, please let the trustees know as soon as possible.

The amount you pay is a contribution towards the cost of running the charity. Items covered by the WMC include:

- Building repairs and maintenance
- Servicing and repair of water and electrical installations
- Decoration cost
- Administering the charity
- Cost of property management fees
- Building Insurance

The level of WMC is usually reviewed annually but the charity reserves the right to review this more frequently if it is in the charity's best interests.

### **Council Tax and Council Tax Benefit**

You are responsible for paying your own council tax and will receive the annual council tax notice from the local authority in March each year. People living alone may be entitled to a reduction in council tax.

If your income consists of the basic retirement pension and you have only modest savings, you may be entitled to Council Tax Benefit. Please speak to Somerset Council if you are unsure of your entitlement or need help in completing the claim form.

## **Utility Bills**

In addition to the weekly maintenance contribution, residents are responsible for paying their own utility bills. Meters will be read prior to occupation. The resident should provide the charity with utility providers details in the case of emergency. The almshouses have wall mounted electric storage heaters installed as the main form of heating.

## **Avoiding the Risk of Fire**

All the almshouses are fitted with mains fitted smoke detectors.

There are also fire instructions on a notice on your front door, and a fire blanket in your kitchen. In the event of a fire, only tackle the fire if safe to do so.

Evacuate the almshouse, closing the door behind you and raise the alarm by ringing the fire brigade on 999. Do not attempt to return to the building to retrieve any personal belongings. The fire evacuation point is in front of the NatWest Bank, The Parade.

Please be conscious of the risk of fire, for example, regularly checking at night or before going out that appliances have been fully switched off. It is especially important that those who smoke do so outside the almshouse. Do not wedge doors open or leave chip pans, or any pans on the hob unattended.

## **Security**

Please consider the following:

### **DO:**

- Keep your front door locked at all times.

### **DO NOT:**

- Allow a stranger to enter your home without proof of identity.
- Leave ground floor windows open so that intruders can gain access.
- Keep cash or valuables in your home.

**BE AWARE OF** bogus officials or doorstep salesmen. Always ask for proof of identity.

The clerk/trustees hold a master key which can open your front door, but it will only be used in an emergency or with your permission. A key is also held by the Property Management company. You must not fit locks and chains without the trustees' consent as these may delay access for emergency services.

Your privacy will be respected. The clerk has strict instructions only to enter your home:

- if you ask her or him to do so, or
- if you have given permission for work to be done in your absence, or
- in an emergency.

Please note that routine 3-monthly property inspections will be carried out by a representative of the Property Management company.

**Please do not obtain extra keys without first asking the trustees, as this may lessen security.**

### **Routine Visits**

Residents will be visited in their new home by the clerk and/or trustees shortly after they have settled in with their occupancy pack. Three-monthly property maintenance inspections will be carried out by Greenslade, Taylor Hunt (GTH).

A mutually convenient time will be arranged beforehand.

### **Consulting Residents**

The trustees will hold meetings from time to time to discuss the running of the almshouses with you and your neighbours. You can also talk to a trustee in private by asking the clerk to arrange this. Consultation and involving the residents in the day-to-day running of the charity's almshouses is intended to benefit all concerned. Trustees welcome the residents' views on matters affecting their quality of life at the almshouses.

#### **The trustees will consult you:**

- Before any changes are made to the rules and regulations applicable to residents.
- before any work is done on your almshouse (except in an emergency)
- before making changes to the amount of weekly maintenance contribution payable
- before anyone enters your home
- if you raise a difficulty with them.

In the event of a pandemic, the clerk/trustees may decide to implement temporary rules for the safety and protection of residents. Where such rules go beyond those implemented by the government or local authority, residents will be consulted.

### **Absence from Home**

You are expected to be in full-time occupation of your almshouse and extended periods of absence during the year might lead the trustees to conclude that you have less need for almshouse accommodation than others.

Residents must live in the almshouse as their permanent home and not be absent for more than 28 days in any year without the prior consent of the charity. If you go away for any seven-day period, please inform the charity of your temporary address and contact phone number. Should you return earlier than planned, please inform the charity immediately you arrive home as it is important in an emergency to know if any residents are away.

Before going away, please ensure that all food has been disposed of or put away, taps and appliances have been fully switched off and windows shut. If you are leaving your almshouse during the winter months at all, please make sure that the heating is on to minimise the risk of burst pipes, etc.

## **Employment**

With the permission of the charity, residents may be allowed to work from their almshouse, however they must guarantee that this will not be disruptive for other residents and that it will not involve delivery or storage of items and/or visitors to the buildings.

Appropriate insurance must be obtained and maintained.

## **Visitors – Family and Friends**

**Visitors are not permitted to stay in an almshouse, except in exceptional circumstances and with the consent of the trustees.**

Where permission is granted, occasional overnight stays only will be permitted but these must not be regular occurrences. It is vital that trustees are aware of any overnight visitors for safety and security reasons.

## **Smoking**

There is a strict no smoking policy inside the almshouses.

## **Pets**

There is a no pets policy, due to the size and situation of the almshouses. This does not apply to service dogs (eg. guide dogs & hearing dogs).

## **Mobility scooters**

There is a no mobility scooters policy, due to the size & situation of the almshouses.

## **Improvements to your Home**

You must not carry out any internal or external improvements, alterations, repairs or decoration, plumbing or electrical installations of any kind to your home, nor employ any contractor to carry out any work on your behalf. You must submit a request for any changes you may need to make to the Trustees. No shelves, cupboards, locks or fittings shall be fixed or removed without prior consent. For all major works, the trustees will instruct an architect or surveyor to design and plan the work before placing an order with a building contractor.

As the trustees have responsibility for the long-term maintenance of the almshouses, they must consider individual resident's' requests for alterations alongside their own maintenance programme. If an alteration would be structurally unsound, reduce the amenities for subsequent occupants, or increase future maintenance costs, it will not be approved. If you live in a listed building, some alterations will need local authority consent before any work can be carried out.

Whilst at all times the charity will respect the privacy of residents, it is a condition that residents allow reasonable and regular access to their almshouses for repairs and decoration to be carried out. Representatives of the charity will visit from time to time by prior appointment.

## **Moving Out**

If you wish to permanently vacate the almshouse to live elsewhere, you must give the trustees written notice of not less than one calendar month. Maintenance contributions remain payable until the notice period expires and the dwelling is vacated. When the resident vacates for whatever reason, all items belonging to the resident should be removed by him or her forthwith. In the event of the death of a resident, their personal representatives are responsible for WMC until the premises are cleared of personal possessions and the keys are returned.

If a resident were to leave their almshouse dwelling without giving notice, they would be liable for paying their WMC for a period of one month after the date on which they vacate as well as utility bills.

Trustees have the right to start the process of setting aside the appointment in the event of non-payment of WMC.

In the event that any possessions, chattels or goods are, without the written agreement of the charity, left abandoned by the resident in the almshouse after the resident has vacated, the charity will take reasonable care of them for a period of up to 6 weeks. After this period the resident agrees by signing the Letter of Appointment that the charity may sell them and, out of the proceeds, pay any outstanding amounts owing to the charity, including outstanding weekly maintenance contributions and any other expenses, including disposal and removal costs.

## **Re-Housing**

If you wish to move from one almshouse dwelling to another, you should contact the clerk to discuss the matter. While every effort would be made to assist a resident to move if there was a good reason, the decision would depend upon availability and be entirely at the discretion of the trustees.

There may be circumstances, for example during extensive refurbishment or other unforeseen circumstances, when the charity may require to ask you to vacate the dwelling and move, either temporarily or permanently, to another dwelling. Your views would be taken into account, and you would be given at least three months' notice should a move be necessary.

## **Gifts and Legacies**

It is the trustees' policy that no one involved in the running of the charity should accept any gift or legacy from a resident. If you wish to donate anything to the charity, please contact the clerk to the trustees. All such matters will be dealt with in confidence.

## **Section 4 – The Property, Fixtures and Fittings**

The Minehead office of Greenslade Taylor Hunt is currently contracted by the Charity to manage its almshouse properties. Their address is: Greenslade, Taylor, Hunt (GTH), 8 The Parade, Minehead TA24 5UF

### **The procedure for reporting any maintenance issue is as follows:**

Any maintenance issues, please report them on 01823 348880 or email [maintenance@gth.net](mailto:maintenance@gth.net) . Only then, if neither is possible, you may call in at their Minehead office. Office hours are 09.00 – 17.30 Monday to Friday and 09.00 – 13.00 Saturday.

Any urgent or emergency matters outside these hours which cannot wait until the next working day – please refer to the list of preferred contractors and agencies at the end of this handbook. If the matter is deemed non-urgent you may be liable to pay the costs.

### **Furniture and Fittings**

Although the almshouses are offered unfurnished, the charity provides and maintains all floor coverings, an electric fitted oven and hob and bathroom suite.

### **Heating, Electricity and Hot Water**

The main source of heating are electric wall mounted storage heaters that are provided. Residents are not allowed to use any heating appliance that has not been agreed to by the charity, such as portable gas or electric heaters, as these pose a serious safety risk. The use of paraffin oil is also strictly prohibited.

The hot water cylinder is in the bathroom airing cupboard.

### **Electricity Meter Mains Switch and Fuse Box**

Your electricity meter is in the cupboard in the hall.

The electricity mains switch is in the cupboard in the hall.

The fuse box is in the cupboard in the hall.

Please switch the electricity off at the main switch if you have an electrical fault or emergency and it is safe to do so.

### **Mains Water Stopcock**

The water stopcock is located under the kitchen sink. Please switch the water supply off at the stopcock if you have a burst pipe or other water supply emergency and it is safe to do so. The water main supply can also be switched off in the road outside.

### **Risk of Flooding**

The almshouses fall within a flood risk area and as a result flood boards are provided and stored in the understairs cupboard. Residents are responsible for the installation of their flood boards if there is a risk of flooding.

## **Legionella**

The risk of contracting Legionnaire's Disease from a domestic property where the water services are regularly used is very low, however the risk increases if the water services have not been used for an extended period. Residents are advised to adopt the following recommended procedures:

Ensure the thermostat on your hot water system is set to a minimum of 65c but be aware that the risk of scalding from outlets that are not fitted with a thermostatic mixer valve is greatly increased.

Any hot or cold tap that is not used within a seven-day period should be flushed through for at least 2 minutes on a weekly basis on your return to the property. Avoid splashing to minimise the release of water droplets / aerosols.

Any shower that is not used within a seven-day period should be flushed through for at least 2 minutes on a weekly basis or on your return to the property at both maximum and minimum temperatures. Avoid the release of water droplets / aerosols by either securing a plastic bag over the shower head with a corner cut off to allow water to escape or by removing the shower head and placing the shower hose over the drain outlet.

Any toilet that is not used within a seven-day period should be flushed on a weekly basis or on your return to the property. The lid should be closed to avoid contact with any water droplets / aerosol.

Shower heads should be cleaned and disinfected regularly to ensure no scale or algal build up.

## **Gardens**

The almshouses do not have any gardens nor any outdoor space for storage.

## **Parking**

There is no resident or visitor parking available.

## **Repairs and Decorations**

The charity is responsible for both external and internal repairs and decoration to your home and the communal parts. You are not permitted to carry out any internal decoration or alterations of any kind to your home, nor employ any contractor to carry out any work on your behalf. You must submit a request for any changes you may need to make to the Trustees. Please report all necessary work to the Property Management Company who will arrange for approval by the Trustees.

You will be consulted in advance about arrangements for works to be carried out. Workmen will not be allowed to enter your home while you are out unless you have agreed to satisfactory arrangements. An exception will have to be made, however, if an emergency arises such as a water leak.

Please also note that should a request to enter to carry out repairs is not responded to, written notice will be issued in advance of a specific date on which such repairs will take place. The clerk/property management company will then allow access on that given date.

### **Insurance**

The charity insures the building and its own contents. The charity recommends you take out your own contents insurance policy.

Please do not keep more cash in your home than is necessary to meet day-to-day expenses and keep valuables out of sight.

### **Television and TV Licence**

Residents need a television licence to use any television-receiving equipment including TV set, set-top box, video or DVD recorder, PC or mobile phone to watch, stream, or record programmes as they are being broadcast. This includes foreign broadcasts.

The Resident is responsible for applying & paying for their own licence.

There are television concessions available. Details on the TV Licencing website.

### **Cleaning**

You are responsible for keeping your own almshouse clean, including cleaning the windows inside & outside.

Storing excess items presents a safety hazard and in extreme cases of hoarding, trustees may have to consider setting aside the resident's appointment.

When you move into your home the Clerk will ensure that you are familiar with:

- action to be taken in the event of a fire
- how to operate all the equipment in your home
- heating and hot water system.

### **Refuse collection and recycling.**

Refuse will need to be in black bags. A maximum of four sacks will be collected every 3 weeks. These should be stored in the cupboard under the stairs with the recycling boxes/bags, as there is no outside space. Recycling and food waste are collected weekly. Bags and boxes for collection should only be put out onto the pavement on collection day.

### **Telephones/broadband**

You are responsible for making your own arrangements for installing telephone/broadband in your almshouse through your chosen provider.

## **Section 5 – General Information**

### **Doctor and Dentist**

If you do not have a general practitioner (GP), the clerk will be able to give you the names of GP practices in the neighbourhood. The name of your GP must be given to the clerk.

You have every right to see your doctor, nurse, or other carer in confidence and to keep your medical affairs entirely to yourself if you wish. However, if you have a chronic health problem, it would be advisable (and you might feel safer) for the clerk to be made aware of it so that appropriate action can be taken in an emergency. Anything you tell the clerk will be kept in confidence within the charity.

If a resident's health deteriorates, they must be willing to accept advice and guidance from an appropriate medical professional within the National Health Service supported by Social Services as necessary. The clerk/trustees will also consult with the next of kin, Social Services, and other agencies if necessary.

### **Emergency Contact Details**

If you become ill or are in difficulties, when informed the clerk will make every effort to get in touch with your next of kin, your doctor, or the ambulance or social services on your behalf. Please therefore provide the trustees with authority to contact your doctor and next of kin directly in the event of emergency by signing the 'GP Authorisation Form' and 'Next of Kin contact consent' both of which form part of your application form for alms-housing.

It is important that you let the clerk have details (names, addresses, and telephone numbers) of these essential contacts. If the details change from time to time, please remember to inform the Clerk.

### **Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance/Universal Credit**

If your income consists of the basic retirement pension and you have little or no capital, you may be entitled to Housing Benefit or Local Housing Allowance to help with your housing costs. Even if you do have income in addition to your basic retirement pension, you may still be entitled to some help with housing costs. To claim Housing Benefit / Local Housing Allowance you should ask for an application form at your local benefits office (DWP) or the Somerset Council's Housing Department. It is important that you inform your local benefits office if there are changes in your financial circumstances.

Eligibility for state benefits changes from time to time. If you need advice on state benefits, good sources of information are the Citizens Advice Bureau and Age UK.

### **Wills**

You are strongly advised to make a will and it is best to ask a solicitor to help you with this. If you need help in finding one, the local Citizens Advice Bureau will be able to suggest names.

As stated under 'Gifts and Legacies' it is the charity's policy that no one involved in the running of the charity should accept any gift or legacy from a resident. If you want to donate

anything to the charity, please speak to the clerk. All such matters will be dealt with in confidence.

Almshouse charity staff nor trustees cannot act as executors of residents' wills.

### **Next of kin**

The name and address of your next of kin, or a nominated representative, should be supplied to the charity. He or she may be contacted should the trustees have concerns about your wellbeing.

### **Lasting Power of Attorney**

It is strongly recommended that you arrange a Lasting Power of Attorney, which allows you to appoint someone to look after your finances and to take welfare and healthcare decisions on your behalf in the event of your mental incapacity. Again, you should seek legal advice from a solicitor.

### **Social Media**

Those residents using social media such as Facebook and Twitter, are asked to respect the fact that no views should be expressed via social media about the charity, its trustees, other residents or staff.

## **Section 6 – If Things Go Wrong**

### **Household Emergencies**

Any maintenance issues, please report them on 01823 348880 or email [maintenance@gth.net](mailto:maintenance@gth.net). Office hours are 09.00 – 17.30 Monday to Friday and 09.00 – 13.00 Saturday.

Any urgent or emergency matters outside these hours which cannot wait until the next working day – please refer to the list of preferred contractors and agencies at the end of this handbook. If the matter is deemed non-urgent you may be liable to pay the costs.

### **List of Preferred Tradespeople to contact outside office hours**

There is no guarantee that any local tradesperson will be able to attend to your needs immediately. However, they will attend as soon as they can.

- Jason Coates – Plumber – 07790345290 / Coa21tes@aol.com
- Kevin Clark Quantock Woodwares Handyman 07961579243  
kev@quantockwoodwares.com
- Crosswells Electrics - 07970359432 crosswells.mike@gmail.com
- Chris Moore – Exmoor Appliance – 07714004140 - chrismoore060587@gmail.com

- J Cleaning - 07729054292 - info@jw-cleaning-company.com

The water supply company in this area is Wessex Water. wessexwater.co.uk

They deal with mains water supply and sewerage issues as far as the road outside the almshouses, but this does not apply to issues within your dwelling.

The electricity supply network is maintained by the National Grid. nationalgrid.co.uk

**Their emergency phone number is 0800 6783 105 (24hr)**

## **Personal Problems**

If you have any personal problems over money or any other matter and you have no family or friends whom you feel able to consult, the trustees will be pleased to help or offer advice if they can. You can ask to see the clerk or any of the trustees and your concerns will be treated in the utmost confidence.

## **Complaints**

If you have any concerns, please bring them to the attention of the clerk who will do their best to resolve them. In most cases, minor issues can be dealt with informally, quickly and efficiently and to the resident's satisfaction. The trustees and the clerk can only resolve problems and improve the service if you speak up when things go wrong.

Set out below is a procedure to be followed if residents wish to raise a complaint in connection with the occupation of their almshouse, or about services provided by the charity.

- Minor matters should be referred to the clerk.
- If the clerk is unable to resolve the matter, or if there is a persistent problem eg. loud noise or matters affecting health and safety, the resident should refer it to the clerk in writing. All communications about complaints will be treated in confidence.
- If you are dissatisfied with the clerk's response, you should write formally to the chairman of trustees asking the trustees to consider the matter. You may, if you wish, attend the meeting when your complaint is being discussed, accompanied by a friend or adviser. The chairman will write to you afterwards to advise you of the trustees' decision and to inform you of any action taken to resolve your complaint.
- If you have a complaint about a member of staff employed by the charity, other residents, or about a serious breach of health and safety regulations, you should put your complaint in writing to the chairman of trustees, with a formal request for it to be considered by the trustees at their next meeting. You will, if you wish to exercise that right, be entitled to attend when your complaint is being discussed, accompanied by a friend, advocate, or professional adviser.

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