



The
United
Reformed
Church

Help and Advice Group

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Bulletin 5: GENERAL UPDATE

The Help & Advice Group was set up by Synod in 2009, to support local churches in being informed and effective in their life and mission. The Group is made up of four members of local churches, together with administrative support from the Trust Officer. We are willing to try to provide specific advice or organise training days on particular topics. Please get in touch if you have questions or wish to suggest a training or discussion event.

This article is part of a series giving an overview of particular subjects of interest for local churches. We also circulate general updates from time to time. Bulletins will also be posted on the members' area of the website with direct links to other websites.

Where readers are directed to web-based resources, the Synod Office is willing to respond to reasonable requests for printed out information for readers without web access, although they may find it more satisfactory to follow up their interest through their local library's web access.

National Minimum Wage

Churches that employ caretakers, cleaners, administrators, youth workers, etc, should note that the national minimum wage increased to £5.93 an hour from 1 October 2010. The development rate for 18-20 year-olds is now £4.92 and the young workers' rate is £3.64 for 16-18 year-olds. Further information can be obtained from:

www.hmrc.gov.uk/payepayroll/day-to-day/nmw.htm.

Churches may also remember that General Assembly in 2008 called on churches to pay a living wage (resolution 33), currently £7.60 an hour. For further information, see www.church-poverty.org.uk/getinvolved/churches/livingwage/livingwagebriefing2010/view.

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act, which consolidates all anti-discrimination legislation, also came into force on 1 October. Church employers should now be careful not to ask health or disability-related questions of prospective employees or their previous employers until a job offer has been made. Further information can be obtained from:

www.equalities.gov.uk/equality_act_2010.aspx.

Health & Safety Guide

Synod Office has purchased a copy of a useful introductory book *Health & Safety: First Principles*, which is available to any church wishing to borrow it. Some churches may find it useful to obtain their own copy.

Radio Microphones

Bulletin 3, sent to Church Secretaries last September warned that the Government planned to change some of the available frequencies in 2012, which will affect some radio microphones. Most churches will be using the unregulated frequencies, so they should be able to continue using their radio microphones without any problem. Churches using licensed frequencies that held a valid channel 69 licence in 2008 may be able to claim compensation of up to 55% of the cost of replacing their equipment, but to do so must register with Ofcom before the end of the year. More information is given online:

http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/pmse_funding/. Churches without internet access who wish to know more should contact the Synod Office. Claims are administered through Equiniti Ltd, 0800-011 3617 or

<https://www.shareview.co.uk/Tasks/Ofcom/PMSE/NewClaim.aspx>.

Fire Safety Surveys

Tyne & Wear Fire Brigade has been carrying out visits to churches in recent months to check that adequate fire safety precautions have been taken. Churches are therefore encouraged to check that their fire risk assessments are up to date. Churches with 5 or more employees must keep a written record of their assessment, but it is good idea to keep it written down anyway. Further information is available at: www.communities.gov.uk/fire/firesafety/firesafetylaw/. The frequently asked questions page gives a helpful overview. There are also detailed guides on that website specifically designed for small or large places of assembly.

Comparative Quotations

The Help & Advice Group and the United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited recommend that churches consider obtaining 2 or 3 quotations for medium-large building works (say, over £5,000). This can help you to ensure that the contractor is charging a reasonable price, and that the contractor is of a reasonable quality. Churches with historic buildings may be interested in the online directory of specialist contractors, www.buildingconservation.com.

However, it will not always be appropriate to seek comparative quotations. For example, if there is only one contractor in the area specialising in this type of work, or if you have established a good working relationship with a particular contractor. Even so, it is worth comparing prices occasionally, to make sure that your favourite contractor doesn't begin to take you for granted.

For minor works, churches may find it useful to give authority to a small group to oversee arrangements and report back to the next Church or Elders' Meeting. It would be up to the church to set an appropriate level after which the works would have to be referred back.

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