

How to ...

Host Warm Spaces in Churches

The approaching cost of living crisis means that this Autumn many more people will experience fuel poverty. It is highly likely that vulnerable people may find themselves unable to heat their homes, access hot water or even boil a kettle. Councils across the country are looking to provide people with 'warm spaces' - places during the week where they can come for warmth and company. Churches are ideal places for people to come and find warmth, hot drinks, etc. as part of serving the community.

There are a number of ways in which this might happen

1. Advertising existing services and events as opportunities for warmth. Coffee mornings, weekday services and church activities could all become places where people who need to gather in the warmth might be invited. If you offer coffee after a weekday service for example it might be possible to have an extended 'coffee time' afterwards enabling people to remain and chat for a couple of hours in the warmth.
2. Churches might want to set up a specific time of the week when they consciously invite people who are struggling with the cold at home to come in to get warm for a while.
3. It is possible that your local Council is looking to set up networks of warm spaces within the community. For example, Bristol City Council is preparing to partner with churches and other groups in the city to provide warm 'welcoming spaces' and they will be offering help to cover the extra costs associated with keeping buildings open and heated during those periods.
4. There may be other churches locally that you could work with to co-ordinate times or to draw on a wider pool of volunteers.
5. If your church is not in an area with a high level of need perhaps you might consider partnering with a church which has higher community needs and fewer resources available, to enable them to be able to afford to open and finance a 'warm space' in their premises.

If we want to provide a 'warm space' in our church what do we need to think about?

- **You will need to be clear about what you are going to offer.** Will it be simply a space for people to sit and read, have a cup of coffee, etc.? Will you want to offer Wi-Fi and office equipment for people to work? What about running activities for young children? Think about different zones: quiet spaces / social spaces / board games area, etc. Consider lighting, can you make it feel 'home like'? Signposting people towards other support?
- **You will need to be sure that you have the capacity to sustain the service you want to offer.** Do you have sufficient volunteers to staff the warm space and how long can you offer realistically each week? Many of the people who may most need access to warm spaces are likely to be vulnerable, elderly or disabled, so will the space you are able to provide be sufficiently accessible?
- **You will need to complete a risk assessment and consider any additional safeguarding precautions that might be needed.** You can use our [sample risk assessment form](#) for this. If you have questions or concerns about safeguarding, please

contact your church safeguarding officer who in turn can liaise with our Diocesan safeguarding team.

- ***Is this something we want to do ourselves, or would we be more effective working in partnership with others?*** Who else in the community might be offering a similar service, are there other churches we could work with? Or if we can't do it ourselves who might we support elsewhere?

Questions to consider:

- Physical accessibility – are there any changes to the building needed? Signage, ramps, seating, toilets?
- Can we afford the extra costs of heating the building for longer?
- Inclusivity of the spaces for all; e.g. language – do we need signs in different languages?
- Are there any extra safeguarding requirements?
- How will we ensure a Covid Safe space as the winter may bring increased infection rates?
- How will we recruit volunteers, how many do we need? Is there a limit on the numbers who can attend depending on how many volunteers are available?
- How will you promote your warm spaces within the community?
- What about the language you use (BCC has chosen to use the language of welcoming spaces) and how will it be received?
- Is this outside the normal work of the church, will it require extra insurance? (Advice from Ecclesiastical Insurance: as long as these daytime events are run and managed by the PCC then this type of event is covered by the policy as standard.)
- What existing events or activities could also become 'warm spaces'?

Resources and support: (Diocesan contact is [Chris Dobson](#))

- Consider contacting your local council community development team to see if they are operating a scheme to fund 'warm spaces' and whether they will advertise your space and offer funding for 'warm bank' providers?
- For Churches in the City of Bristol please contact the Cost of Living Church Steering Group by emailing [Andy Street](#) or [Chris Dobson](#) for more info. BCC is creating a map of all available 'warm spaces' in September.
- For safeguarding concerns contact Adam Bond [Safeguarding Adviser](#)
- For accessibility questions please email Alice Kemp [Accessibility Adviser](#)

And finally...

Please don't be daunted by all this information. Many of the things you already do can be adapted to become warm spaces. This is quite a sobering thing for churches to have to be thinking about but also represents a real opportunity to serve our communities and build relationships with people who might not otherwise have engaged with the Church.