

Running a Night Shelter safely this winter

Increasing numbers of parishes are participating in temporary night shelter schemes to provide rough sleepers in their community with shelter, companionship and food. This brief guidance note will highlight some of the things you need to consider if you are organising a shelter this winter.

Setting up a temporary night shelter is not something to be entered into lightly, but is extremely rewarding for everyone involved. Thorough planning and preparation are essential to make sure the project runs smoothly and all participants are safe.

Here are some of the issues to think about before embarking on a night shelter project:

- 1) Appoint a project coordinator to ensure the shelter is properly managed.
- 2) Talk to other people who have been involved in similar projects. If you are going to be part of a rolling shelter, have the others involved participated previously?
- 3) Take a look at your premises. Can people access, move around and leave without being hurt? Your night shelter will bring people onto your premises after dark. Good lighting and a plan for dealing with ice and snow are some of the aspects to consider.
- 4) As the property isn't usually used as overnight accommodation, carefully consider fire safety arrangements. Do you have a Fire Risk Assessment and does it need reviewing?
- 5) Are your statutory tests and inspections up to date and has all critical safety remedial work been carried out? Do you have documentation to support this?
- 6) If you are providing a meal for your guests, make sure that your kitchen facilities are clean and safe. Food should be prepared in a hygienic manner with those involved showing a high standard of personal hygiene. You should also comply with all Local Authority requirements, which may include registering with them as a food preparation premises.
- 7) Be aware of heavy and awkward items of furniture or equipment which may need to be moved around. Are your volunteers physically able? Do they know how to lift safely and when to ask for help?
- 8) Make sure you have enough volunteers to cover your night shelter and that they are given sufficient information about what to do to be able to be safe and get the most out of their experience. Volunteers need to know how to cope with emergencies such as fire, conflict and medical emergencies.
- 9) Guests should be screened by a competent person and you should know who to expect in advance. Your guests should know what you expect of them and what they can expect of you.
- 10) Liaise with your diocesan Safeguarding Coordinator regarding any safeguarding matters that you may need to consider, including the minimum number of volunteers needed to safely staff the shelter.

We strongly recommend you carry out a risk assessment for your night shelter taking into account all the points listed above (as applicable) and record. In this way, if something goes wrong you will be able to demonstrate you planned your night shelter carefully and did what you reasonably could to protect all involved. Having a risk assessment to read will also help your volunteers to feel properly prepared for their role.