



Church is Changing – Safeguarding Guidance for PCCs

During the next few weeks the role and function of many churches is changing. Many Parishes are keen to offer support to our vulnerable neighbours who may be in self-isolation or quarantined. Any activities need to continue to employ pragmatic Safeguarding procedures to protect vulnerable people and to protect our volunteers.

There are many community networks being set up by communities to ensure that neighbours can support one another. This guidance does not affect peoples ability to get involved with initiatives on the ground as an individual.

Local Response and Networks

It is important to know what resources there are available in your local area. How can your Parish support local initiatives so that there is a streamlining of services and some working together to best meet need? It might be sensible to ask about volunteering for a charity that has already set up to support various groups of vulnerable people. Or look at other ways the church can support. For example: by using the church as a drop off point for donations which can then be collected/distributed to other groups who are delivering services.

Where a gap in service or support is identified this might be an area that you as a PCC feel able to meet the presenting need. Remember this is also a fast moving and fluid situation and any arrangement must be implemented with regard to any changes in government guidance and advice.

Safety First

Do not establish any activity or plan that will place volunteers and those in need at any additional risk:

- Check with your insurers that you are able to undertake the proposed activity.
- Do not relax safeguarding good practice and standards
- Do not be tempted to cut corners in order to get something done

It is more likely that anyone who wishes to take advantage of a vulnerable person could in fact slip more easily through the net (financial impropriety/ scamming - debit card pin numbers/ contactless payments, Keys to house). Equally it is likely that someone with the best of intentions might do 'the wrong thing' and inadvertently cause harm (Wanting to bake or cook meals for frail, ill or vulnerable people is kind but potentially high risk). Vulnerable people are thus even more vulnerable now and require our highest standards of care.

PCCs should complete an activity risk assessment before embarking on any scheme or activity, detailing their thought processes covering the above considerations and any other identified areas of risk. A template risk assessment form is available here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/3.%20Model%20Activity%20Risk%20Assessment%20Template.docx>

Wider risk assessment guidance to consider is available in the Safer Environment and Activities Practice Guidance:

https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Safer%20Environment%20and%20Activities%20Oct19_0.pdf

Appoint a person or team to oversee and manage any activity or scheme.

Physical distancing not social distancing

Contact with vulnerable people

Be led by what the person you are hoping to support wants, not by what you might think they need. Be clear as to whether you are in a position to meet what they want or not. Also please be aware that you might not know who is vulnerable at this time, so make any service you offer as widely known as you can.

Be alert to those that you make contact with of other stresses and pressures that they may be experiencing. Assuming that a person is ok because they are self isolating with other family members for example might not be sound. Some people find going to work or school a lifeline from stresses, pressure or even abuse at home.

Physical contact is clearly potentially dangerous, and must obviously be avoided in all but extreme circumstances. Social contact however can occur virtually. Inventive ways to keep people connected will be very valuable to lots of people, but think about those too who might not be entirely comfortable with social media for example. Might it be possible to post a weekly briefing/newsheet through the door of individuals, thus letting them know they are thought about? The telephone might also be a lifeline for some. Setting up a regular arrangement to call a person, or providing a phone number which is staffed for a couple of hours each day, may be a great help.

By telephone:

When appointing people to receive enquiries or to initiate contact in order to offer support; this could include offering practical support/ receiving requests for support or prayer and pastoral support. Ensure that:

- Volunteers are safely recruited (this type of role is not eligible for a DBS check but where possible use existing volunteers who are known)
- There is clear understanding of the purpose of the call/ contact.
- identifying yourself (working on behalf of the church/ Parish),
- have a system of recording encounters and
- that each volunteer has a person to report to for accountability purposes.
- Volunteers should not provide their personal information home addresses etc.

In person (delivering food/essentials parcels):

Many Parishes will want to know what they can do to help vulnerable self isolating people obtain food and essential items. There are a number of different approaches being considered and implemented across parishes and by locally organised groups.

Delivering Food/ essential items:

- Consider infection control measures, do not enter a home of any person who is self isolating or in quarantine;

- leaving goods on doorstep, wearing gloves when carrying bags or disinfect bags/containers with wipes before leaving them.

Shopping on behalf of vulnerable self isolating people:

Before permitting volunteers to undertake tasks on behalf of the church that require them to handle money, proper thought needs to be given to the processes around this and the necessary checks to undertake. Sadly we are already seeing cases of people stealing money or bank cards from vulnerable people, so we need to protect our neighbours accessing our help, and protect our church and volunteers from accusations of theft or abuse. Check with your church's insurance company about liability cover and any steps they might expect you to take. Such a service to church attenders is likely to come under normal pastoral care, but you should check cover with them before advertising to the wider community.

- Handling the money of vulnerable adults is considered to be a 'Regulated Activity', so volunteers doing so must have an Enhanced DBS check with check of the Barred List for the Adult workforce (Speak to your DBS lead recruiter/PSO or 31:8 0303 003 11 11 to discuss ways to implement pragmatic and timely DBS checks if more are needed).
- Ensure volunteers handling money are recording what money they receive from vulnerable people and what change (if cash is given) that they have returned. Receipts should be issued and copies kept by the volunteer and/or the scheme coordinator.
- Records of visits/ service provision should be logged and reported to the activity leader. This provides transparency and accountability that protects the volunteer from accusations of theft or abuse, but also may be necessary to inform Public Health England of possible contact and transmission opportunities if a volunteer is subsequently diagnosed with the virus.
- Local practice needs to be established of how isolated people are going to pay for any shopping/ goods requested/ fetched by volunteers. We need to protect volunteers from being left out of pocket if payment is not forthcoming from the service user.

NB:

Do not offer to take a vulnerable persons bank card it is obviously too risky as it presents a significant risk of theft or accusation of such.

Cash presents an infection transmission route and isolated people may soon run out of cash to give out.

Personal cheques present the risk of bouncing.

Consideration could be given to low-risk account details, such as a PCC account being given to people accessing the service so they could pay shopping money into that account by BACS transfer if they have access to online banking.

We are not going to recommend any one option, but ask that you work with your volunteers locally to establish the safest money handling procedure that you and they are happy to operate, if this is the type of support the PCC wishes to implement.

During this time the Diocese safeguarding Team will remain available for advice, guidance and support:

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Diocesan Safeguarding Team

With thanks to Diocese of Salisbury, Truro and Exeter