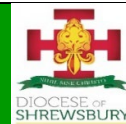


Hiring of Church Premises to Third Party Organisations



Purpose of the Guidance

Many churches offer their premises for hire to outside and volunteer groups and organisations, for a variety of purposes. You may need to give special consideration to situations when you hire out your church buildings to allow third parties to use the church properly.

This brief guide is intended to help you understand what you are required to do, as a minimum, to ensure the safety of your employees and visitors should you hire church premises to outside and volunteer groups, and organisations.

Concerts, school performances, keep-fit classes, youth clubs, business meetings, diet clubs, drop-in centres are just a few examples of how churches and church halls are being used today. This can help the church reach out to the local community and can also generate a useful source of income.

One question that is often asked is what do churches need to consider when hiring out church premises to volunteer groups or outside groups and organisations.

The Diocese' Insurers (CIS) provide comprehensive guidance (as at May 2021) for the purposes of 'Letting Parish Church or Halls (Premises)' which should also be referred to.

Booking Agreements

Whenever the premises are hired, a formal booking agreement, that sets out the conditions for hire, should be agreed, to the satisfaction of the Parish Priest and signed, on behalf of the hirer and on behalf of the church management.

To assist the Parishes CIS have also produced guidance and agreements for Licencing Churches, Parish Hall and car parks for Tenancy and short term or one-off hire.

Health and Safety

It is very important that the premises you provide are safe for the use intended e.g., will it be used for a one-off concert, a weekly youth group or for a monthly business meeting? Ensure that regular, routine health and safety checks, of your premises, are carried out with your Health and Safety Representatives; such as emergency lighting, welfare/WC facilities are adequate. Ensure your Parish 'Third Party Use of Church Premises' risk assessments are current and review them regularly. Parishes must comply at all times with national and local Covid-19 regulations and guidance. Consider the prevailing conditions before proceeding with any hirings whilst Covid-19 remains endemic.

Share key information from your Fire, Health and Safety and Covid-19 Risk Assessments with all your Hirers.

Make sure the Hirers are made aware of local Fire Procedures and how to report any accidents occurring on the premises. Do they have details of the Key holder and any emergency arrangements? Refer to section on 'Visitors' in the Diocese Health and Safety Manual.

Ensure a suitable risk assessment has been carried out, by the Hirer, on their activity. Consider the hours of use; noise levels if the premises are intended for entertainment, are there any restrictions on timing i.e., noise after midnight etc. The number of people attending the meeting or function, have the hirers provided 'stewards' or nominated people who will maintain their sobriety if alcohol is provided. Hirers should also have assessed the risks of transmission of Covid-19, where appropriate. All this should be reflected in their risk assessment(s).

The Diocese insurers advise that Hirers should not be permitted to undertake high risk activities (e.g. using inflatables, bouncy castles, fireworks). Hirers should not be permitted to store equipment at the premises.

Public Liability Insurance

The Dioceses' Public Liability (third-party) Insurance provides an indemnity to the Diocese as property owners if held legally liable for accidental bodily injury to members of the public or accidental damage to their property while the premises are being hired. This may cover premise use by church volunteers for community use.

This does not extend to indemnify any outside groups hiring the premises. Dependant on the assessed level of risk posed by the operation of any third party; or particularly for commercial use i.e., Diet or Fitness classes, the Parish should obtain written confirmation from hirers that they have public liability cover for their activities while the church premises are being hired. Parishes/Dioceses can insist that all hirers of their premises have PL insurance and it is strongly recommended to do this so to protect both the hirer and the Parish/Diocese. The Insurers recommend that such third-party hirers PLI should have a minimum limit of £5M.

Most organisations that operate on a regular basis are likely to have insurance cover. Individuals hiring the premises for a private function should check with their household insurers to ensure that the public liability cover would extend to the organising of such events. Hiring agreements incorporating an indemnity clause must be in place.

Safeguarding

The hiring of church premises to children's groups is a common scenario for many churches and the Parish should refer to the Diocesan Safeguarding Guidelines and/or the Parish Safeguarding Officer or Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser for specific advice and guidance on this matter.

It is, however, good practice for the Parish to obtain written confirmation from any such group that it has a safeguarding policy and that its users the Disclosure and Barring Service.