

Guidance for Parish Administrators – Responding well & safely

What about those times when I am the only one in the office?

It may be that your working situation is such that you can find yourself working alone in a setting that is open to the public. If this is the case, then it is sensible to have considered what measures can help to reduce your vulnerability. Some key questions to think through are:

- Is it absolutely necessary to allow public access at those times when you are working alone or is it possible to restrict public access only to those times when another person is present?
- When working alone, can you keep the main door locked but have a bell system for callers?
- Is there an entrance space which can be used to meet people in the first instance, rather than inviting them into the main office area?
- Can you identify someone to contact within close proximity, who can come quickly in case of the need for support. Is their number readily to hand, i.e. pre-programmed, on speed dial? Do you have an agreed code word or phrase that would identify an urgent need?
- Do you keep your mobile phone in your pocket, or within easy (but not obvious) reach?
- Is it possible to position yourself between unknown callers and the door, to enable you to exit first and quickly if need be

What should I do if someone starts to get angry?

- Keep calm, do not raise your voice but speak calmly and use a measured tone and pace.
- Try to maintain an acceptable distance, don't walk towards the person who is angry, or suddenly stand or sit.
- Try to maintain eye contact.
- Listen rather than talk.
- Try not to make defensive responses.
- Do not make appeasing promises that you can't follow through.
- Repeating back calmly what you have heard the person say will let them know that

- you have heard them and may help to calm a situation.
- If the matter is something that someone else needs to deal with, give a brief
- response stating what you will pass on and to whom.
- In some circumstances it may be helpful to suggest that they put their concern or
- complaint in writing, giving reassurance that this will be forwarded to the
- appropriate person for a response.
- If the anger persists, calmly but firmly request that they leave the office, and repeat
- this request if necessary.

What if someone asks for money or food or is looking for accommodation?

Don't wait to be asked, make sure that you know what would be expected of you by your PCC and Incumbent when someone asks for money or food. If there isn't an agreed policy, ask for one to be discussed, agreed and given to you in writing.

As a general rule it is not advisable to give money directly, so knowing where someone can go to get help can be useful. It is worthwhile spending a couple of hours drawing together a list of local sources of support and advice and their contact details (– perhaps this is a project that a volunteer in your parish would like to take on, a uni student or newly retired bod?)

Here are a few ideas:

Surrey County Council's website will tell you if there is a Help Shop in your locality.

The Citizen's Advice Bureau website has a search facility through which you can establish where the nearest CAB advice can be obtained from.

District and Local Councils will have information for the homeless.

Domestic Abuse: Surrey Sanctuary helpline number is 01483 776822

Concerns regarding the safety of children, young people or adults who might be vulnerable, should be passed on to your Safeguarding Officer in the parish. Write down any factual information that you have been given, or to describe observations you have made, and make a note of the date and time this information was provided/observed.

You may find it helpful to attend Safeguarding Training – there is a Basic Awareness course relating to Children and Young People and another relating to Adults who may be Vulnerable. These are open to anyone from our parishes for whom it is relevant and details

can be found on the Diocesan website Safeguarding and Inclusion pages.

How should I respond to someone who seems anxious, worried or distressed?

The best thing you can do, if you are able to, is to give a little time to listen, a little space given can take the immediacy out of anxiety or worry. Don't feel you have to offer solutions, just listen and acknowledge – "I can see you are a bit worried -would it help to tell me a little about what's bothering you?" But don't get overly drawn in or compromise the job you need to get on with. There are others in the parish who will have more time to come alongside in these situations. So, if you have a pastoral team in your parish, then offer to ask one of them to get in touch.