



Advice for setting up a Warm Hub

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Introduction

Responding to the needs of those affected by the current cost-of-living crisis is important and can take different forms. As the social action agency of our Diocese, Caritas Northampton can provide help and support to assist in developing specific social action in our parishes and schools. Our hope is to help parishes think about, and plan for how they could respond to the current situation in their community.

What is a Warm Hub?

Warm Hubs (also known as Public Living Rooms, Warm Banks, and Warm Spaces) are safe, welcoming, free spaces for anyone in your community to get warm.

While there is no single model of how your Warm Hub can look and operate, this guide will explain the basics of setting one up in your parish and provide ideas for making the most out of the space you have available. It is not intended as a comprehensive checklist, and you may need to think about and potentially consult other departments in the Diocese of Northampton, especially in regard to safeguarding and health and safety considerations.

Why are they needed?

Energy costs are nearly double what they were last winter - combined with the rise in inflation and rent costs, the cost-of-living crisis means many in our communities will struggle to adequately heat their homes and stay warm. In 2021, [8,500 people died](#) due to cold homes across England and Wales - with the worry that this year the number of excess deaths will be even [higher](#).

Although not a solution to the cost-of-living crises, and with an ongoing need to continue to campaign for change, 'Warm Hubs' could make a real difference in enabling many people in our communities to get through with the winter with their physical and mental health intact. They also have the power to reduce isolation, bring together other support services and build-up communities.

Location and furniture

Our parish buildings are often great spaces to develop a Hub - with many of our churches located in economically disadvantaged areas, we are well placed to provide spaces at the heart of our local communities.

It is important to create as welcoming and comfortable environment as possible. People may want to stay for long periods, so some comfy seating is a must. [Freecycle](#) and [Gumtree Freebies](#) are good sources of free, good quality second-hand furniture.

Tip: Try to have a mixture of different chairs if possible so people can choose how comfortable they want to get and to provide support for those who need assistance into and out of chairs (e.g., provide some chairs with strong arm support for older people who need to hold onto the chair). All furniture should be able to be wiped clean.

Other important items to consider are:

- Do you have adequate toilet facilities - These need to be cleaned and fully stocked regularly. Do you have sharp's bins and baby changing facilities.
- Is there access to hand washing and/or sanitisation stations.
- Do you need Co2 monitors.
- Has all electrical equipment been PAT tested.
- Is there adequate outside lighting.
- Do you have a responsible person for fire safety and first aid.
- Is there a clear fire evacuation route and meeting point.

Heating and funding

The first thing to consider is the temperature of your Hub - remember, not everyone's ideal temperature is the same so you may not always please everyone. However, you should be offering a minimum of 18 degrees and a maximum of 24 degrees.

Keeping the Hub warm comes with its own costs. The [Centre for Sustainable Energy](#) have produced a guide for how community groups can conserve energy and thus save money. It is possible to estimate the heat demand of a parish building which may be useful, by completing this [energy calculator](#); it takes about an hour but can help map out what your energy bills for your Hub would look like.

You could also use the advice given by Energy Saving Trust for how to [cut energy costs](#), and use [energy saving appliances](#). [Money Supermarket](#) also provide advice on how to save energy which could be applied to your Warm Hub - but this advice could also be shared with those who visit your Hub.

There are various ways you can raise funds to go towards your Hubs energy costs. Local fundraising is a good start - this can be direct donations from members of the parish or other fundraising activities in the parish (from cake sale to a sponsored event), or even local businesses may wish to sponsor the Hub. Crowdfunding is also an option - using online platforms it can be easier to reach a wider audience than traditional fundraising; [Crowdfunder](#), [SpaceHive](#), and [Justgiving](#) are three of the best crowdfunding sites for community groups.

Do contact the [diocese fundraising office](#) to discuss local potential funding sources.

Accessibility

It is crucial that your Hub is as accessible as possible for everyone in the community, From wheelchair users to people with hearing impairments. [Euans Guide](#) has excellent advice on how to make your Warm Hub accessible.

If someone using the Hub reports or presents with mental or physical health issues, then knowing how best to act and support them is important.

- [Mind](#) give excellent advice if you're concerned that someone is struggling with their mental health.
- [Age UK](#) provide guidance on how to respond if someone is physically unwell.

Ultimately - listen, be patient, and signpost them to services if they want to know more.

Travel

The cost-of-living crisis is impacting people's ability to travel, and this may be the main barrier for people wanting to visit your Hub.

If people are struggling with this, they may be eligible for concessionary travel through their local councils depending on where they live. In most areas, there is a Community Transport service that could be accessible for some people wanting to use the Hub.

Although some will struggle with transport, it is important that for safeguarding reasons that volunteers do not offer lifts to the Hub.

Tip: have copies of local bus and train timetables for people to use so they can plan their time in the Hub, avoiding longer waits at cold stops and stations.

What to offer?

The first thing to offer is a friendly, warm welcome. Have at least two volunteers in the hub at all times - (as part of this it should be planned who will open up and how the keys are exchanged). How regularly your Hub is open will depend on the number of volunteers and the spaces availability and how it fits in with other parish activities - but you may want to focus on doing it for short-periods on a regular basis, so you don't spread your time and resources too thin. Make your Hubs opening and closing times clear and ensure people who visit the Hub understand that they cannot stay past closing or overnight.

As well as warmth, your Hub can be a space for people to come together to share activities. Having a book-swap space, board games, as well as simple activities such as a quiz, can make your Hub feel more welcoming.

Tip: If you have a small community book/board game library in your Hub, try to have a mix of genres and games for different ages (and check if they have all the pieces!).

Although the expense of doing this would need to be considered, the offer of Wi-Fi and places to charge electronic devices allow people to save money, connect with others, and access support and services online.

A nice hot cup of tea or coffee can put a smile on anyone's face, and importantly [helps warm us up](#). Two things to consider; can the kettle be accessible to all so that people can help themselves, and keep in mind that if you began to prepare food regularly you may need to apply for a [food licence](#). When providing refreshments, ensure that they are pre-packaged foods that do not need heating and are not homemade. Allergy information must be clearly visible.

Caritas Northampton has put together a Cost-of-Living Crisis Booklet to help people to know where to go for help and advice. Hard copies have been sent to all parishes. This booklet can be downloaded here:

Northamptondiocese.org/costoflivingcrisis

However, you must remember, that you are only signposting to advice and are not providing the advice yourself. This could be leaflets for other charitable services or that of the Local Authority.

Volunteers, health and safety, safeguarding and first aid

It is important for the safety of the volunteers and people using the Hub that a comprehensive risk assessment is completed. Within the risk assessment you should include room capacity (allow 1 metre squared per person to calculate capacity), the number of volunteers per visitors, and how you will access a phone in emergency.

The [Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency \(CSSA\)](#) has produced an excellent [document](#) with relevant safeguarding guidance which should be read in addition to this document.

Ensure that you have a sign in and out sheet for people using the Hub, with their contact details. This is in case of emergencies and for fire safety. [Form Case 5](#) (session recording sheet) developed by CSSA can be used for this purpose. It is also important to ensure that all under 18s who visit the Hub are supervised at all times by a parent/guardian.

It is also incredibly important to ensure that your Hub volunteers are safely recruited; all volunteers must have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check before they can work at the Hub. The Diocesan [Safeguarding office](#) have designed guidance and resources to help you manage this. The [Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency](#) have also designed important resources and templates for projects to recruit safely, respond to allegations and concerns, and develop codes of conduct.

Safeguarding the volunteers and people using the Hub is essential - preventing issues is ideal but when issues do arise it is important to know what to do next.

If in doubt, contact our [Safeguarding office](#).

It is important to protect the rights and safety of those using your Hub when advertising or posting about it online or in any literature. Images can only be used when everyone in the image has provided written consent. Where a child or vulnerable adult is in the photo, their parents/guardians/carer must give their written consent. This also applies if any photographs are taken by users of the Hub, and volunteers must inform people of this if they go to take a photograph including others. If you are going to use images from the Hub they must be positive and uphold the dignity of the people in the photographs.

Ensure there is a first aid kit that is fully stocked and accessible, and follow your parish health and safety procedures if there is an accident.

Advertise

Once your Warm Hub is up and running, make sure you register it with the [Warm Welcome](#) scheme. They are developing an interactive map, so that people in need of a Warm Hub can locate their nearest one.

Make sure you get information (opening days and time, location, what's on offer) into your parish newsletter and social media. Let other faith and non-faith organisations, your local councillor, and local businesses know about your Hub so they can promote it themselves.

When promoting your Hub, it is important to clarify that it is volunteer run and is not a crisis service which can offer support aside from a warm space.

Get in touch

If you want further advice, have any questions, or want to share news about the work your parish is doing in setting up and running a Warm Hub then please get in touch with the Caritas office 01604 434362

**“What matters is rolling up our sleeves
and putting our faith into practice”**

From a message of Pope Francis for the sixth World Day of the Poor.