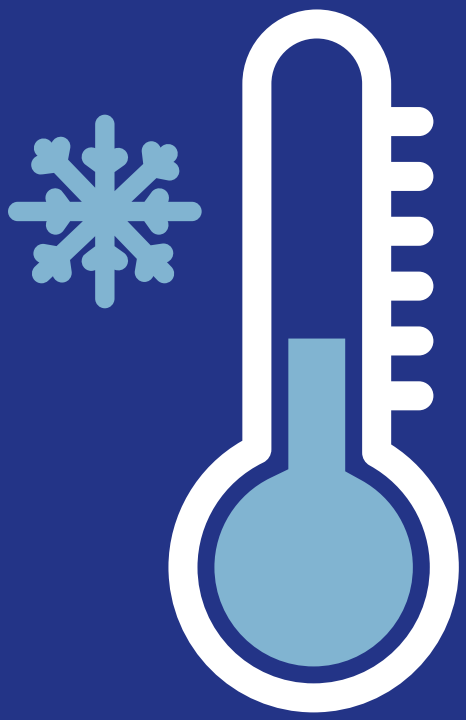
The Diocese of Southwark

# WINTER-READY TOOLKIT



Christ Centred I Outward Focused

# CONTENTS


| | |
|---|---|
| Introduction | 2 |
| Social isolation, loneliness, and mental health | 3 |
| Additional financial pressures | 5 |
| Heating our homes | 7 |
| Climate & Nature Resilience | 8 |
| Youth advice | 10 |
| Suggestions for Older Individuals | 12 |
| Rough Sleeping | 14 |




# INTRODUCTION

Winter can be a particularly challenging time for many of us. The days get wetter, colder, and shorter. Our finances can become stretched, particularly at a time when the cost of living is so high. At the same time, winter is often a time when churches reach out to their local communities afresh, inviting them in for Christmas services and events.

***"We don't have to fix everything."***

This toolkit aims to help your church think about how it can get ready for, and make the most of, the winter months. It asks how can we come alongside those in our local community, care for our environment, and respond practically to the challenges of the winter months. The following pages outline some suggestions of things to consider and ways that you might approach them. We don't need to try and find a solution to every problem we encounter, but instead can aim to practically share God's love by being with and walking alongside our neighbours, caring for our communities, and stewarding the resources and places entrusted to us.

***"The best community engagement is done in collaboration."***

However, we appreciate that everyone's context looks a little different. You will have different assets and skills to draw on, and different needs to respond to. The best way to make the most of the winter months is in conversation with your congregation and neighbours. The best approach is always to talk to individuals, find out what people are struggling with and what they want to bring to the table, and work from there. The outcome may surprise you, but will be much more tailored to what is really going on in your context.



# SOCIAL ISOLATION, LONELINESS, AND MENTAL HEALTH

With the weather getting worse in winter, many people feel less inclined or are less able to leave their homes as they would normally. You may notice a drop in the numbers of people attending your church's activities, whether that is your Sunday services or weekday events.

We are, rightly, often very aware of the risks of social isolation and loneliness for our older population. However, there are a wide range of people who will be feeling lonely and isolated throughout the winter months. Recent government research found that 16-24 years olds were actually the most likely age group to report feeling lonely or isolated from wider community. Other individuals statistically more at risk of isolation are: those from Global Majority Heritage backgrounds, those who have experienced long-term unemployment, and those who live in more deprived areas.

The winter months also pose additional challenges for many individuals' mental health. The financial pressures of the winter months can cause feelings of anxiety and overwhelm. This can be exacerbated over the Christmas period. The increased encouragement to spend time with family and friends can feel difficult for those who are unable to do so. Additionally, those who have spent a joyful time with others over Christmas, may experience feelings of loss or disappointment when things return to normal.

## IDEAS FOR GETTING STARTED

- Consider keeping an eye on who is no longer regularly attending your church events and activities. Liaise with your safeguarding officers to find an appropriate means of checking in with them and keeping in touch.
    - You could ask people to opt-in to receiving regular contact if they know that they will not be able to get out and about as normal.
    - Could you write cards or create 'thinking of you' packs (like we did in Covid) for those who are not able to regularly attend activities over the winter months? The more personalised the better.
- Consider asking whether people would appreciate some online activities during the winter months that they could join at home.

- MIND have a great general guide for engaging with those who might feel lonely at Christmas time. You can find it here: https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/christmas-and-mental-health/supporting-others-at-christmas/
- Consider planning some fun activities in January so that people have things to look forward to after the Christmas period is over.
- In case of particularly harsh weather, consider creating a 'severe weather response plan.' Ask who you might need to check in on.
- Spending time outside and in nature is great for our mental health. Consider how you could make the most of your outdoor spaces during the winter months.
    - For example, encouraging those who are able to do some gardening in the church grounds, or putting together a church building maintenance party to catch up on and get ahead of church maintenance for spring.



# ADDITIONAL FINANCIAL PRESSURES

During the winter months, most of us will face some additional financial pressure. Whether that's due to rising energy bills (more on heating our homes below), or because we need to buy items for ourselves, our homes, or our loved ones. For example, cold and wet weather may mean that we need to buy new coats, shoes, and other items of clothing. This can be particularly difficult for families who need to buy new items for their children each year as they grow out of what they had before.

Christmas is often a time of celebration and joy, but can bring the additional pressure to buy presents, decorations and additional food and drink. Many households may be asking if they need to go without this year because the financial burden is too high. Being able to celebrate Christmas should not be a luxury that only a few can afford.

Whilst we value collaboration and conversation, directly asking about people's finances can lead to shame or might feel invasive. If someone finds themselves struggling due to the added pressures of the winter months, we want to respond in a sensitive way that affirms their dignity and agency. If someone discloses information about their finances that suggests they are vulnerable, please talk to your safeguarding officer.

## IDEAS FOR GETTING STARTED

- Be conscious of what financial contributions you are asking from congregation members for winter and Christmas events. Events don't need to be free, but is there a way that you could offer discretionary discounts for those experiencing hardship?
- Know where the local support services are: for example, a food bank, clothes bank, community lunch club. Consider putting up flyers for these services in your building.
- Consider speaking to your local food bank, clothes bank, school, or hospital and asking whether they need any donations. They will know what people need and want over winter in a more personalised way.
    - If you are donating items, make sure that they are of a good quality. The best questions to ask are 'would I want someone to give *me* this?' and 'would I give this item to a *friend*?.'
    - Running a craft club or a knit and natter? Consider doing a drive to make items for your local food bank, clothes bank, school, or hospital.

- Acts 435 are a charity that direct connect those who want to give with those who have a specific need. Anyone can donate to a specific ask of genuine need, such as money towards bedding, a laptop, a washing machine etc. Churches can also sign up to register the needs of those they are walking alongside. You can find out more here: https://www.acts435.org.uk.



# HEATING OUR HOMES

In the colder months, we all know that it costs more to heat our homes in winter. Citizens Advice are expecting individuals to see an increase in their bills, despite the VAT removal from the 1st October. Churches can do some simple things to signpost to support or welcome people into a warm church space.

## IDEAS FOR GETTING STARTED

- Consider opening up your church as a warm space during the winter months. We have a dedicated guide for this on the Diocesan website which you can access here: https://southwark.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Warm-Spaces_-Warm-Hubs.pdf.
    - These spaces work best when there is a shared feeling of community and belonging. This might mean asking people to participate in putting out chairs, serving drinks, or choosing activities.
- You could encourage your whole church to cut down on energy costs this winter. Find fun and creative ways to educate and save money together - whilst also reducing carbon emissions and treading more lightly on God's planet. There is a comprehensive list on the Money Saving Expert website that individuals can do at home. You can access it here: https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/utilities/energy-saving-tips/
- Be aware of the support that is available to help with energy costs and signpost to it around your building. Your Local Authority will have a more comprehensive list of local services, but you should also be aware of the following:
    - The Warm Home Discount - this government financial aid should be given automatically to eligible individuals receiving social security. However, it might be helpful to publicise or be aware of in case an eligible individual is accidentally not recieving it. You can find out more here: https://www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme
    - Citizens Advice have comprehensive information available for those needing extra support to pay their energy bills. You can find out more here: https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply/get-help-paying-your-bills/getting-extra-support-from-your-energy-supplier/
    - If you are in Kingston, Merton, Sutton, Richmond, or Wandsworth Boroughs, ThinkingWorks offers a fuel poverty support service (funded by the LA) to help vulnerable residents save energy and be warm and well. You can find out more here: https://www.thinkingworks.co.uk/

# BUILDING CLIMATE AND NATURE RESILIENCE IN WINTER

As our climate changes, extreme weather is becoming more common. During winter this can mean heavier rainfall, flooding, and storms affecting our buildings, churchyards, and communities.

Churches have a unique role to play, not only in preparing buildings and communities for severe weather, but also in caring for the land entrusted to them. Healthy churchyards, thriving green spaces, and resilient ecosystems can help absorb excess water, support wildlife, and strengthen local communities in times of difficulty.

By taking practical steps during the winter months, churches can help build resilience for their own buildings, those in their parish, and the nature surrounding them.

## IDEAS FOR GETTING STARTED

- **Be flood prepared**. Churches are often built on higher ground and can act as places of sanctuary during flooding. Consider how your church might support the wider community during severe weather events, and how you might protect your own building - even simple actions like putting valuables on higher shelves can help if you are in a flood prone area. Ecclesiastical have further advice here: https://www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/church-flood-advice/.

- **Manage rainwater well**. Check gutters and drains before winter storms, and consider whether rainfall can be slowed, stored or absorbed through measures such as water butts, longer grass areas or rain gardens. Be alert to parts of the church grounds that are prone to flooding and review your latest Quinquennial Inspection Report for any related recommendations.
- **Work with your community**. Engage with local authorities, emergency planning teams and community groups to understand if there are local resilience plans in place and how your church can contribute.

- **Care for trees and soil**. Healthy soils absorb and store more water, reducing flood risk and supporting biodiversity. Consider leaving autumn leaves in place where appropriate to enrich the soil and protect the ground from heavy rain. After periods of high winds or storms, it is worthwhile inspecting young trees and other vulnerable plants.

- **Support nature.** Protect hedgerows, scrub and areas of long grass that provide valuable winter habitat for wildlife. Winter can also be a good time to plan spring planting that will increase biodiversity and help landscapes adapt to changing weather patterns.

- **Avoid unnecessary disturbance**. Where possible, leave habitats undisturbed during the winter months, allowing wildlife to shelter and recover.

- **Plan for those who may need extra support.** Consider who in your congregation or community may be particularly vulnerable during severe weather and how your church might keep in touch with them during periods of disruption.

For more guidance on acting for climate resilience in your church, explore the dedicated CofE webpage: https://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/climate-resilient-church#na.



# YOUTH ADVICE

The Winter months can have their joys and celebrations but also can make young people more vulnerable as the dark nights set in and the weather becomes colder.

## IDEAS FOR GETTING STARTED

- When the weather changes, and where it is harder to have meetings in your building, consider having an online quiz or touchbase.
- Consider encouraging your young people to stay safe by making them aware of this advice:

### Ways for Young People to Stay Safe This Winter

- **Dress for the weather.** Wear warm layers, a waterproof coat, gloves, a hat, and sturdy footwear with good grip to stay warm and avoid slips.
- **Stay aware of their surroundings:** Pay attention to the people and environment around them, especially when travelling alone or in the dark. Avoid distractions and seek help if something doesn't feel right.
- **Keep headphones at a low volume or avoid them when walking:** Large headphones or loud music can stop them hearing traffic, cyclists, emergency vehicles, or people approaching them. Staying alert helps keep them safe.
- **Share their location with a parent:** Let someone know where they are going, which route they are taking, and when they expect to arrive. Consider using location-sharing with parents on your phone when travelling.
- **Keep their phone charged:** Make sure their phone is fully charged before leaving home and carry a portable charger if possible.
- **Travel safely:** Check bus, train, and weather updates before they leave. Allow extra time for delays caused by snow, ice, fog, or heavy rain.
- **Take care on icy and slippery surfaces:** Walk carefully, avoid running, and use designated paths where possible. Black ice can be difficult to spot.
- **Avoid isolated routes:** Stick to busy, well-lit streets and avoid shortcuts through parks, alleys, or unfamiliar areas, especially after dark.
- **Look out for friends and others:** Travel with friends when possible. Check that everyone gets home safely and report any concerns to a trusted adult.

*Stay warm, stay visible, stay connected, and stay aware. Avoid distractions so you can enjoy winter safely.*

**Protecting young people's mental health in winter:**

Adult and child mental health can be challenged during the winter months. Here are a few websites with various resources that may be helpful:

- **Young Minds - Winter Mindset:** https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/blog/keeping-well-in-winter-how-shifting-your-mindset-can-help-you-cope
- **Winter Wellbeing Toolkit (Primary School Age):** mhs_december_winter-wellbeing-toolkit_primary.pdf
- **Winter Wellbeing Tookit (Secondary School Age):** mhs_december-winter-wellbeing-toolkit-secondary.pdf



# SUGGESTIONS FOR OLDER INDIVIDUALS

**BY SAGE (SOUTHWARK AND AGEING)**

Many suggestions elsewhere in this document apply to everyone irrespective of age. In addition, useful resources are available that focus especially on issues most likely to be experienced by older people (for example anyone who may be less mobile). While many older people are increasingly "tech-savvy", others are to varying degrees 'digitally excluded' and may miss out on targeted practical advice that is available online, such as:

- Independent Age's winter benefits checklist. https://www.independentage.org/sites/default/files/factsheets/2025-08/Checklist-Winter-benefits-in-England-and-Wales.pdf

- Age UK's 'Stay Healthy in Winter' advice. https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/keep-well-this-winter/stay-healthy-in-winter/

Some older people may recognise their needs and happily welcome available help, though some will be determinedly independent and may resent any implications that they might need assistance: having information widely available can avoid individuals feeling they are being personally judged. For some, potential current needs may be less apparent (for example when a person continues to live in a long-established family home that results in them being deceptively "asset rich").

## IDEAS FOR GETTING STARTED

- Churches can act as a trusted signpost to help and services available. Find out what is on offer locally (This will differ from borough to borough – although 'Age UK' has national branding, each Age UK is an independent charity, and will provide different services).
    - London Borough Age UKs are listed here: https://www.ageuk.org.uk/london/about-us/local-age-uks-in-london/
    - Kingston Upon Thames: Age Concern is now called Staywell https://www.staywellservices.org.uk/
    - Merstham, Redhill, Reigate Age Concern: https://www.ageconcernmrr.org.uk/
- Get printed 'winter-ready' booklets and make them available. Many older people will prefer to browse a booklet rather than search the internet. You can view these helpful publications online, and churches can order multiple free printed copies:

    - "Winter Wrapped up" information guide from Age UK: https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/keep-well-this-winter/winter-guide/
    - Winterwise booklet from Independent Age: https://www.independentage.org/get-advice/winterwise

- Churches that organise warm spaces, activities or pastoral care teams to help older people may be able to get extra suggestions from SAGE (Southwark and Ageing) – the diocesan group set up to resource churches for their ministry alongside older people
    - www.southwark.anglican.org/sage
    - email sage@southwark.anglican.org



# ROUGH SLEEPING

Many churches are rightly concerned for those who are sleeping rough through the winter months. The longer, wetter, and colder nights are dangerous for those who are experiencing homelessness and who do not have a roof over their heads. We know that some churches experience an increase in individuals sleeping on church grounds during this time.

## IDEAS FOR GETTING STARTED

- Consider publicising information on who you can highlight rough sleeping to, in order to get the right help to the individual involved. You can anonymously highlight someone who you have seen sleeping rough to Streetlink at any time. Find out more here: https://thestreetlink.org.uk/
- Homelessness Sunday takes place in October each year. If you have missed it this year, consider marking it at another point this winter. Housing Justice have resources for services available on their website and are holding a homelessness Sunday service in partnership with the Church of England this year. You can find the recording and other resources here: https://housingjustice.org.uk/donate-or-get-involved/homelessness-sunday
- Consider signing your church up to be a winter night shelter. It's a little late in the season to run one this year, but now could be a great time to start planning for next year!
    - We always advise that winter night shelters are run with in partnership with an experienced charity, such as Glassdoor or Robes, who will be able to offer guidance and support to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all involved. If you would like to informally discuss how to get started, please feel free to contact Nicole McKeever at nicole.mckeever@southwark.anglican.org.

# FURTHER SUPPORT AND CONTACTS

Thank you for taking the time to engage with this toolkit. We hope it has provided some practical ideas and support as you prepare for the winter months in your church.

The needs and resources of every parish will be different, and we recognise that not every suggestion in this guide will be applicable in every context. If you would like to discuss any of the ideas explored in this toolkit, or would like support in developing your church's response to the challenges and opportunities of winter, please do get in touch. We would be delighted to help signpost resources, share examples of good practice, or talk through ideas relevant to your local context.

## CONTACTS

For advice on the following areas, please do contact the relevent people below:

**Nicole McKeever, Social Action Development Worker**
nicole.mckeever@southwark.anglican.org

**Sophie Roberts, Diocesan Environmental Officer**
sophie.roberts@southwark.anglican.org
*For advice on creation care, climate resilience, biodiversity, Eco Church, and wider environmental action in your church.*

**Natalie Walters, Head of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation**
natalie.walters@southwark.anglican.org

***If you have concerns for a vulnerable person within your church please talk to your Parish Safeguarding Officer.***