

Guidance for PCCs, incumbents and cathedral Chapters: opening church buildings for works to the building and interior

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This advice is part of a set of guidance which aims to support PCCs, incumbents, and cathedral Chapters as steps are taken towards the re-opening of cathedral and church buildings. All these documents are available on the Church of England website via the dedicated Coronavirus pages.

This note provides advice on access to church and cathedral buildings for professional contractors such as architects, conservators, archaeologists and ecologists. Guidance on access to buildings for construction work can be found on the Church of England Coronavirus pages.

This guidance reflects the situation following the new guidance from the House of Bishops' on 5th May 2020 and the Prime Minister's address to the nation on 10th May and subsequently issued '[Our Plan to Rebuild](#)'. Government guidance will continue to evolve so we will regularly review this advice. We also welcome questions and comments – please email churchcare@churchofengland.org.

The government guidance issued on 11th May says that “All workers who cannot work from home should travel to work if their workplace is open.” This applies to a number of contractors who routinely may work in your church, and they can now be welcomed back if they are able safely to do so. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Professionals carrying out regular maintenance of buildings, interiors, equipment, services, etc. This includes boiler inspections, testing of access systems, etc.
- Surveys and inspections that are undertaken as part of the regular cycle of good maintenance (for example quinquennial inspections, energy audits).
- Emergency repair and conservation work.
- Pre-planned repair and conservation work to address already identified issues.
- Surveys and inspections as part of the planning process for a project (ecology surveys, archaeological/ structural/engineering/conservation/building performance investigations).

Note that the requirements for Faculties and other permissions, where required, remain in place. You should inform your archdeacon as usual if works are to take place in the church.

Because our buildings have been closed for a number of weeks we would suggest you find ways to communicate to the church/cathedral community and wider public the circumstances in which limited access to the building is being allowed to resume. It is important to give reassurance that necessary safety procedures are being followed. It is also important to communicate that church buildings remain closed to the general

public in line with government requirements, and that necessary work being undertaken does not yet mean a reopening of church and cathedral buildings to the public for prayer and worship, but that we are all working hopefully towards that day.

Checklist

Before you allow any contractors on site you or your project manager, QI or other professional managing the work should check the following:

1. Does the contractor have up to date liability insurance for all the work they will be doing?
2. Has your contractor carried out a risk assessment for themselves and their staff, updated to reflect the latest government advice on Covid-19?
3. Has your contractor shown you evidence that they have considered safe working practices of contractors and sub-contractors? It could be useful to ask them to refer to the [Construction \(Design and Management\) Regulations 2015](#).
4. Will there be multiple people on site at once, not from the same contractor? If so consult the advice below on multiple access.
5. Will contractors be working on their own in the building? Ecclesiastical Insurance provides [guidance on lone working](#). As with all lone working, the PCC should, where there is one through the project manager, QI or other professional managing the project, ensure they are satisfied with the lone working practices as part of the Construction Design Management Regulations 2015. You may wish the contractor to cordon off areas to limit areas the contractor can access during their work.
6. Even though responsibility for contractor staff usually lies with the contractor, the PCC or Chapter does have general responsibility under occupiers liability for any of your staff or volunteers, so you should carry out a risk assessment for any of your staff or volunteers entering the building, or instruct a suitable person such as your project manager to do so, and confirm they have done so. This should consider:
 - a. How the building will be accessed (who will lock and unlock, specific entrances and exits to be used, any one-way arrangements)
 - b. Evacuation procedures in the case of an emergency
 - c. How a record of people entering and leaving the building is being kept
 - d. Where cleaning stations and materials will be positioned and whose responsibility it will be to carry out cleaning
 - e. How clean toilet facilities will be provided

Where there is a need to enable access, or where face to face discussions with contractors are needed, these should be undertaken using good practice around hygiene and social distancing. Those classed as vulnerable should avoid such contact and request that such action be undertaken by others in their church community who are willing to undertake these duties.

Advice on having multiple contractors on site

With projects being delayed during lockdown, the Chapter or PCC may have a number of different activities it wants to start or resume as soon as possible. A good cleaning regime and clear signage directing people towards hygiene requirements, along with processes to monitor who is coming in and out of the building are the best ways to achieve this.

If you do want to have multiple contractors on site then a good way to prioritise work is to consider the urgency of the activity and its importance.

Your QI, project manager or other professional would be able to help with this.

Factors to consider when assessing **urgency**:

- Works that keep the building water-tight and safe (e.g. urgent roof repairs, electrical works)
- Works that have a specific season of the year when they must be completed (e.g. bat surveys)
- Financial penalties if work does not happen now
- Necessity for regular maintenance and survey work that prevents more urgent works from being needed in the future

Factors to consider when assessing **importance**:

- Does this work keep church users safe?
- Does this work make the building usable?
- Are the historic fabric and interiors deteriorating without this work?
- Necessity for works such as surveys that will help with medium-term planning (e.g. QI inspections)

Please bear in mind that the outcome of the assessments will be different for each church building. Some places will be able to accommodate more workers than others.

If multiple people are to access a building, even one at a time, then there should ideally be clearly marked areas for each. If this is not possible then a risk assessment should be undertaken by the PCC or a suitable representative, and written down, and all individuals entering the building must be warned of the risks.

What do I do if someone is diagnosed with Covid-19 within 7 days of accessing the site?

If you learn that someone who has suspected or confirmed Covid-19 has been on your site then it should be cleaned in line with [Public Health England Advice](#).

If it is possible, then for historic buildings with surfaces that will be damaged by the products used during decontamination, quarantining the building for 72 hours is advised instead. Historic England provides [advice on what to do for historic surfaces](#). A simple alternative if you cannot quarantine the building and do not have access to specialist cleaning materials is to use mild washing up liquid and warm water.

What do I do if I am concerned that contractors are not following the agreed procedures?

Assuming that your contract states that the contractor is responsible for carrying out a risk assessment and you believe they are not following this then they could be in breach of contract. In most cases if someone is concerned they should immediately remotely contact the main contractor, and record that interaction, asking them to rectify the issue. If they do not do so in reasonable time then you should consider not allowing them back on site.

Your project manager, QI or other professional can support in this.

Useful links

Many professional organisations have links to guidance for contractors on safe working practices and Covid-19. A number are listed below:

[Guidance for construction work](#)

[Guidance for architects and surveyors](#)

[Guidance for archaeologists](#)

[Guidance for organ builders](#)

[Guidance for ecologists](#)

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