



Diocese of Portsmouth
Department for Administration
St Edmund House
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Email: GPalethorpe@Portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

Health and Safety Bulletin (No4)

Issued 9th May, 2017

Polling Station Liabilities

Dear Father,

Guidance as issued by the Catholic Church Insurance Association.

Of interest if you are allowing any church buildings to be used as a polling station.

We shall all be heading to the polls again for the General Election on 8th June 2017.

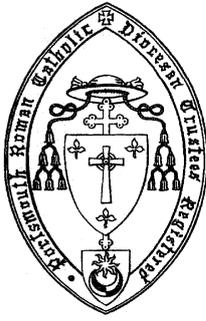
You may recall that we issued guidance on the use of church premises as polling stations in advance of the 2015 General Election. Unfortunately, a number of Public Liability claims were received following accidents on Election Day. In one parish, a voter tripped on an uneven paving slab on a path which wasn't routinely used by the parish and therefore hadn't been inspected. In another incident, a voter allegedly slipped on some debris which had accumulated on an access ramp.

As the election is still five weeks away, parishes still have time not only to ensure that appropriate hiring agreements are in place to provide the diocese with some protection against claims but, more importantly, to take steps to ensure that church premises which are going to be used as polling stations are safe for that purpose, thereby minimising the risk of accidents occurring.

Any claims which result from the condition of the fabric of the buildings or surrounding areas (including car parks, steps and paths), or from parish equipment such as tables and chairs, are likely to be made against the diocese. Parishes should therefore:

- inspect the buildings, car parks and surrounding areas to ensure there are no hazards which need to be repaired or removed in advance of polling day. As mentioned above, this is particularly important if the routes of access and egress on polling day differ from those routinely used by the parish; and
- inspect equipment, including chairs, tables, signboards and so on, and remove anything broken, faulty or in poor repair.

If there are any hazards which can't reasonably be repaired or areas of the site which are unsafe, they should be cordoned off and signed appropriately. These inspections should be recorded and reviewed in the days leading up to the election to ensure that the condition of the premises is still safe and any new hazards which have appeared, such as puddles caused by blocked drains, are dealt with.



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The council responsible for the provision of the polling station should be asked to sign a hiring agreement indemnifying the diocese in respect of any claims arising from the use of the premises as a polling station. The agreement should also require the council to undertake a general risk assessment and a fire risk assessment of the premises to ensure that it is suitable and safe for the intended use. Claims arising out of transient hazards, such as slips on wet floors, are more likely to be redirected to the council. However, parishes need to make sure that those on site on the day are able to deal with issues as they arise, for example, they should be given a tour of the building and shown where to find mops, buckets and wet floor signs so they can clear up any spillages that may occur. They will also need to be shown how any external lights work given the polls close late in the evening.

Finally, the hirer should be asked to inform their contact at the parish if there is an accident to ensure that any accidents which do occur are recorded as necessary. In turn, please inform the Diocesan Health and Safety Administrator, Graham Palethorpe at GPalethorpe@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

If you have any queries, require any further advice or would like to receive a copy of our template hiring agreement, please do not hesitate to contact me or Kathy Perrins.

Kind regards

Emma Reed

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