

Toolkit: Churches & Cool Spaces

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What is a Cool Space?

A Cool Space (or 'heat shelter') is a safe, cool indoor place - such as an air-conditioned library, community centre, or **naturally cool church building** - where people can escape extreme heat during [heatwaves](#). These spaces help prevent heat-related illness by offering shade, rest, and lower temperatures, though they are not a substitute for medical care for those who become unwell.

Church buildings often stay cool even on the hottest days, and because they are present in every community and widely recognised for their hospitality, they are **ideally placed** to open their doors as Cool Spaces.

As UK heatwaves become more frequent due to the climate crisis, **communities will increasingly need accessible places of refuge** from the heat. Because heatwaves can arrive with little warning, it's wise for churches to plan ahead so their Cool Space is ready to open as soon as a heat alert is issued.

**In London, a heatwave is categorised as temperatures of 28°C or more for three consecutive days (there are [different threshold temperatures](#) elsewhere in the country). Prolonged exposure to temperatures above 28°C increase health risks, especially for more at-risk individuals. The Met Office runs a heat-health alert service.*

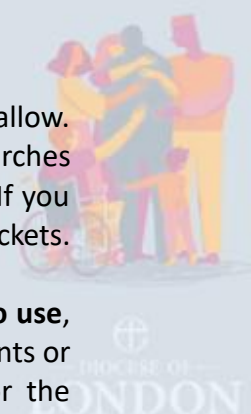
Who are Cool Spaces for?

Cool Spaces are for anyone needing a place with a safe temperature during heatwaves. They might be particularly important for people experiencing homelessness, older people, young children, people with chronic illnesses or disabilities, and those living in flats.

What does a Cool Space offer?

Your Cool Space can be as simple or as equipped as your church's capacity and budget allow. At its simplest, it offers a place to **sit**, access to **tap water**, and use of **toilets**. Some churches may also provide activities, children's toys, reading materials, or free refreshments. If you plan to offer work or study areas, ensure you have reliable Wi-Fi, tables, and power sockets.

A Cool Space should offer a warm welcome, stay below 28°C*, and **ideally be free to use**, though some churches choose to accept donations or run pay-as-you-feel refreshments or activities. When planning your space, consider who you want to serve and tailor the activities and layout to their needs.



Remember, your Cool Space does not need to be a separate activity. If your church is already open for a coffee morning, food bank, or another community project, you can advertise those sessions as a Cool Space and welcome people who need somewhere cool to rest.

Greater London Authority (GLA) – Cool Spaces

The GLA's [Cool Spaces](#) scheme identifies indoor spaces in London where people can shelter from the sun, cool down and rest during periods of hot weather. By providing free access to a cooler indoor environment, these spaces can help reduce the health risks associated with extreme heat. The Mayor of London has also produced guidance on [keeping cool on hot days](#).

If you decide to open a Cool Space, be sure to register on their website.

What rules & guidance should my Cool Space have?

Your Cool Space's rules/guidance will be dependent on your context and what you're offering. These can be displayed on a poster or given as a leaflet to new attendees. If your Cool Space invites people into your church's worship space, consider what behaviours will honour this holy space. As part of normal parish operations, you should conduct a full risk-assessment.

Consider the following:

- **Code of conduct:** expectations of respect and kindness between Cool Space guests, and towards volunteers and staff; prohibiting lying down or sleeping (if you have nearby shaded green space, encourage people to use this instead); designating your space an alcohol and drug-use free zone.
- **Noise:** can people play music, conduct phone or video calls, or would this be disruptive to others using the space?
- **Children:** how to make it clear that children should remain in the care of their parents/guardians?
- **Pets:** will you permit pets or only assistance animals?
- **Safeguarding:** how to ensure your safeguarding policy includes your Cool Space?
- **Capacity:** how many people can you safely accommodate at one time?
- **Emergency procedures:** what will you do if someone feels faint, dehydrated, or unwell due to heat?
- **Accessibility:** is your space accessible and safe for everyone, including people with disabilities?
- **Food and drink:** whether you will allow people to bring their own food and drink into the space?

Can a Cool Space offer prayers and worship?

When hosting a Cool Space, most visitors will respect that they are entering a place of faith, which is also used for prayer and worship. You should consider how to ensure the space is **welcoming to all** who need it, regardless of faith or background.

You may already have services or prayers during the day which people can be invited to where appropriate. Cool Spaces are short-term responses to extreme heat, but you could invite visitors to join ongoing church activities or explore forming a new group if there is interest.

Another option is to offer an optional prayer or reflection time before opening or after closing the Cool Space, allowing people to participate if they choose.

How do I invite people to my Cool Space?

Publicising your Cool Space ensures people know it exists, feel confident they're welcome, whatever their faith, background, or income, and understand what to expect.

Consider promoting it through:

- Clear **outdoor signage** with opening hours, and the facilities or activities available.
- **Informing** your local council, GP surgeries, and community hubs so they can signpost people to your space.
- Posting on church **social media** and local **online groups** to reach people quickly.
- Putting posters on local **noticeboards** or in community newsletters.
- Delivering simple **leaflets** to homes in your parish.

Other things to consider:

- **Opening temperatures:** Decide what temperature will trigger your Cool Space to open, and whether you will close your space if it exceeds 28°C* indoors.
- **Opening times:** Set clear opening hours. The most useful times are typically between 11am and 6pm, with peak heat between 3pm and 5pm.
- **Recording attendees:** Keep a simple log of visitors. If you're collecting personal data, ensure you follow GDPR guidance.
- **Volunteers/staffing:** Identify who will open/close the building, set up and tidy, welcome guests, answer questions, and run any activities. Decide if you need additional volunteers. You may want to identify a lead person for your Cool Space.
- **Budget:** Although a Cool Space can run at low cost, you may need funds for refreshments, electricity, or supplies. If you prefer not to ask guests for donations, contact your local council about public health or community-space funding. You could also have a look at the Diocese of London's [fundraising advice](#).
- **Environmental awareness:** We know that heatwaves are linked to human-driven climate change, so you may wish to share information or run simple activities to raise awareness and encourage environmental action, such as writing to MPs, caring for green spaces, or adopting sustainable habits. More ideas are available on the [Diocese of London Caring for God's creation page](#).
- **Insurance:** Check whether your parish insurance includes your Cool Space activities.

Case Studies:

There are multiple churches across the Diocese currently operating as Cool Spaces including St Margaret's, Uxbridge; Hope Church, Hounslow; St James, Hampton Hill; and St Barnabas, North London. Their participation demonstrates how churches can contribute to London's wider climate resilience efforts, as hotter summers become an increasingly familiar feature

of life in London.

Key contacts/resources

- The UK [Government](#) has published advice on [staying safe in hot weather](#).
- The [Compassionate Communities Team](#) has produced [posters](#) with key contacts – you may find these useful to display in your churches when doing social action ministries such as a Cool Space.
- The team have also produced a [toolkit](#) on [Social Prescribing](#) which you might find helpful when deciding what provisions/activities you could have in your Cool Space.
- The [GLA's](#) Cool Spaces [criteria for 2026](#).
- [Guidance and practical tips](#) for opening your Cool Space has been produced by [Warm Welcome Spaces](#). Their guidance also includes signage which you can use to advertise your Cool Space.