

# Home Groups: Key Mandatory Considerations and Guidelines

## Insurance

Church home groups are considered official church activities **and noted by the PCC. So insurance coverage must be confirmed. It is prudent for the PCC to notify both the church's insurer** and for the Home Group leader to notify **the homeowner's insurer** about the home group. This ensures there are no gaps in liability coverage in case of accidents or claims arising during the meeting a risk assessment (maximum group size, frequency, fire safety).

## Safeguarding

All home groups fall under the Church's safeguarding policy and must comply with Church of England safeguarding requirements.

**The home group leader/host should be familiar with the parish safeguarding policy**

They should ensure the environment is safe and appropriate boundaries are maintained. For example, if any children or youth attend with their parents, never allow a lone adult to be isolated one-on-one with a child, and avoid using private bedrooms or closed spaces for group activities.

It's recommended to have **at least two adults present** at all times when minors are involved, in line with good practice. If the group is adults-only, remain mindful of any adults who may be vulnerable; they should be afforded the same care and protection.

The **safeguarding training** level of leaders should be appropriate to the group: *if under-18s or vulnerable adults ("adults at risk") are involved, the leader must have up-to-date safeguarding training* for those demographics

## Data Protection (GDPR)

Running a home group will involve handling **personal data** (for example, names and contact details of members, possibly notes on prayer requests or pastoral needs). The **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** applies to churches and PCCs – **all personal information collected or used must be protected and used lawfully**. This means you should **only collect data that is necessary** (e.g. a list of members with phone/email for coordination) and have a clear purpose for it (such as arranging meetings or pastoral care). The data should be **kept secure and confidential** – for instance, if a host keeps a list of people attending, it must not be shared beyond what's required for the group's functioning. If you plan to share contact details among group members (for fellowship or rota purposes), you should obtain the individuals' consent or at least inform them under what basis you're sharing

**Ensure HTB has an up-to-date Data Privacy Notice** that mentions usual activities like home groups and how members' personal data is used.

Note that PCCs are usually exempt from having to register with the ICO *if* they only process basic church membership data (including group membership lists) for internal purposes

## DBS Checks

**Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)** checks are a key part of safeguarding, but their necessity depends on who attends the group. If the home group is **adults-only (and not specifically for adults at risk)**, a DBS check for the group leader is not required. The Church of England's safer recruitment guidelines typically require DBS **if a role involves substantial work with children or vulnerable adults**. In a typical adult Bible study group, the leader's role wouldn't meet the threshold for a check unless there is a specific ministry to vulnerable people. **However, if anyone under 18 is likely to attend regularly**, or if the group is aimed at **vulnerable adults**, then **DBS checks become mandatory** for the leaders (and any regular helper). UK law (as reflected in CofE policy) states that anyone undertaking teaching, training, or caring responsibilities for

children **frequently (more than 3 times in 30 days)** is doing regulated activity and **must have an Enhanced DBS check with a check of the relevant barred list**

Similarly, providing pastoral care or instruction to *vulnerable adults* on a frequent basis would require an Enhanced DBS (Adult Workforce). Even if minors are not regular, it is wise to **plan that only DBS-checked adults lead any sessions involving under-18s**, or alternatively, **ask that under-18s attend only with a parent present** if leaders are not checked.

## Food Hygiene

Home groups often include hospitality – e.g. tea, coffee, or the **occasional cake**. While this is usually a simple, informal offering, you still need to consider **food hygiene regulations**. The good news is that **occasional provision of homemade food at a private gathering** is *not* subject to the full raft of commercial food regulations – you do **not** need to register as a food business or obtain a food hygiene certificate just to serve refreshments at a weekly small group. The Food Standards Agency and church insurers note that when food is provided “**on an occasional and small scale (e.g. a church event or village fair with volunteer cooks)**”, it typically does *not* trigger the requirement for registration

## Risk Assessments

Conducting a **risk assessment** is a mandatory step before launching the home group. In fact, **church guidance strongly advises a written risk assessment for all off-site or home-based activities**

Key points to consider in a home group risk assessment include:

- **Fire safety** – Know how people would exit in an emergency; ensure there’s no blockage of exits and that the host has things like smoke alarms.
- **Trip/fall hazards** – Check for loose rugs, cables, or clutter in areas where the group will meet. Good lighting is important for evening meetings [saintnicholaschurch.org.uk](http://saintnicholaschurch.org.uk).
- **Space and seating** – Ensure the room can comfortably and safely accommodate 10–12 people without overcrowding (no stacked chairs precariously, etc.).
- **Bathroom access** – Participants should know which toilet to use; it should be hygienic and accessible (and for safeguarding, if children are present, any potential risk with bathrooms should be mitigated – e.g. no one should enter a child’s bathroom alone except their parent).
- **Kitchen safety** – If hot drinks are served, have a safe system for people pouring them (to avoid scalds), and keep any knives or hazards out of reach. Basic first aid provision is wise (know where the first aid kit is, and who to call in an emergency).
- **Other occupants** – If the host’s family members are around but not attending the group, ensure they won’t inadvertently create a risk (e.g. a teenager practicing archery in the garden during the meeting would be a bad idea!). Also, any pets should be managed (some people have allergies or fears).
- **COVID or illness** – While formal restrictions have lifted, it’s worth noting any current public health guidance (in winter, for example, you might ask people with heavy colds or flu to stay home for that week, etc.). Ventilation can be considered for comfort and health.