Community Toolkit for Welcoming Spaces

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Section 1

Introduction

The Council is keen to work with partners and local communities to develop and promote a network of places where people can come together in a warm, safe, and supportive environment this winter.

We know many such places already exist, providing invaluable services in the heart of the local community, and we'd like to support these places and make sure people know where to find them, by promoting them as 'Welcoming Spaces.'

We hope this guide will help to support you with relevant information on what you need to consider to set up a successful Welcoming Space. The content draws on a range of emerging sources of guidance, most notably the Library and Information Association's CILIP Warm Welcome Toolkit commissioned by Martin Lewis.

1.1   Summary

- **Registering as a Welcoming Space**

You can register as a Welcoming Space on the Bucks Online Directory please add 'Welcoming Space' to the name of the profile as this makes it easier when searching.

- **What your Welcoming Space can offer**

    You will be asked to agree to a Charter (detailed below) when registering as a welcoming space. This is a promise to residents that:

You'll get a warm welcome as well as warm space

Everyone is treated equally, with dignity and respect

Your Welcoming Space will be a safe space

We'll not tell anyone about you needing a Welcoming Space

There is no obligation to provide services including Food, Drink, Wi-Fi etc. however this toolkit will provide guidance for those who wish to do so

- **Funding Options**

Your local Community Board may be able to help you with this. Please contact your Local Community Board Manager to discuss what you would like to do and whether the Community Board may be able to help you.

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1.2   What is a Welcoming Space?

Welcoming Spaces are warm, free, safe, and supportive spaces that you can visit during the winter.

They offer residents somewhere to:

- keep warm and save money on heating
- look after their physical and mental health
- get access to support, advice and Wi-Fi

They're run by:

- Buckinghamshire Council
- council partners
- other local organisations

1.3   How can I register my Welcoming Space?

Registering as a Welcoming Space is easy. Simply follow this link *insert link* and complete the "Register as a Welcoming Space" Form. Please add 'Welcoming Space' to the name of the profile as this makes it easier when searching.

Registering will mean that Buckinghamshire Council can help promote your space to residents and provide you with some marketing materials to help you signpost people to your space too if you would like these.

As part of this, we are asking local organisations offering Welcoming Spaces to sign up to the following 'charter' – a set of key principles so that everyone in a Welcoming Space knows what to expect:

Welcoming Spaces Charter

You'll get a warm welcome as well as warm space

Every time you come to a Welcoming Space you will be given a warm welcome from the staff and volunteers there

Everyone is treated equally, with dignity and respect

It doesn't matter why you need a warm space. Everyone has a right

to be warm, so everyone in a Welcoming Space treats people, and is treated by people, with fairness, dignity, and respect.

Your Welcoming Space will be a safe space

Your Welcoming Space will stick to the safeguarding policies that it always uses, and it will stick to food hygiene rules too!

We'll not tell anyone about you needing a Welcoming Space

If you want to share the reasons you need a Welcoming Space, someone will listen, but they won't tell anyone else unless you give them permission, or they must because of their safeguarding policies.

Welcoming Space participants will be expected to adhere to their own safeguarding policies and ensure that all staff and volunteers are briefed on these procedures.

We also ask that you conduct your own risk assessments of your venue and have in place your own public liability insurance. The [CILIP toolkit](#) provides helpful risk assessment examples as part of their resources.

The remainder of this toolkit will help guide you through some of the key considerations in delivering the most appropriate space for residents.

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Section 2

Physical Space and Location

In this section we cover all the steps you can consider regarding the physical space and the location of your venue.

A warm welcome space should be free to use and encourage people to stay as long as they want. It also needs to be a friendly, comfortable environment where people feel at ease and at home.

Opening times are a key part of this, so you will need to decide what is feasible for your group/venue in terms of how long you are able to open, including whether there is scope to open in the evenings and/or at weekends, depending on your resources.

We understand that this may not be appropriate for every Welcoming Space due to any additional costs that may be incurred, and there is no expectation on organisations to provide anything beyond your regular offer. Whatever support you are able to bring to your local community will be greatly appreciated.

Accessing the Space

The following factors are important for good physical access:

- Approach to building (e.g., dropped Kerbs, signage, etc.)
- Entrance accessibility (e.g., ramps, steps, and handrails)
- Doors (exterior and interior) with dignified access for all and accessible routes
- Lifts and stairlifts that are easily accessible
- Keeping aisles, corridors, doorways, and spaces free of obstruction and with space to accommodate wheelchair and buggy users
- Means for people with disabilities to leave the building quickly in the event of an emergency
- Alarm systems suitable for alerting the hearing impaired
- Critical distances (e.g., width of corridors, aisles, and security sensors)

Room sizes will vary quite a bit and when you are planning how you lay out your space, you'll have to consider the maximum safe numbers, how people will move around the room and whether you want to (or are able to) have separate spaces for different groups, e.g., school children or families with young children. Please see the Warm and safe spaces section for more information on this.

2.1 Heating Costs

Many organisations will need to factor in their own heating costs and projected spend on all of this. It all depends on the type of space, the size of it, and energy prices, which fluctuate over time, but charity organisations like The Centre for Sustainable Energy have put together documents giving tips on how to save energy in community buildings, which includes ideas such as closing curtains, checking your roof insulation, and fitting low-cost secondary glazing on non-opening windows. They also have a heating cost calculator, estimating the heat demand of a hypothetical community building, to help community centres work out how much their typical heating costs could be.

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Energy prices can change so please ensure you check your latest

energy tariff to manage these costs. You can find out your exact rate on your latest statement.

Section 3

Warm and Safe Spaces

Warm spaces should also be safe. Lockdown may be a thing of the past, but you still need to [minimise the risk of infection](#) from COVID-19 and flu, especially for those who are particularly vulnerable to infection. Measures taken to reduce infection during the pandemic should be applied to spaces which may be more heavily used this winter. Capacity, ventilation, and temperature are key considerations, along with a commonsense approach to contact and proximity issues. Settings should consider promoting safer behaviours and actions that reduce the spread of infections as per government guidance.

3.1 Space Planning

- **Furniture**. Avoid furniture which cannot be wiped clean, but mainly where there is frequent change of user (mainly chairs)

- **Distancing**. Where there are corners in corridors and stairwells, use mirrors to increase visibility and to avoid crossing.

Some people continue to feel more comfortable wearing a face mask and this should not be discouraged. You may want to consider offering face masks for those who wish to wear one.
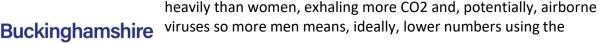
3.2 Capacity

To determine space needs, you will need to observe users (if possible), evaluate existing facilities, and compare them with other similar spaces. It will also be important to consider:

- Opening hours (all or part of the space, including out-of-hours)
- Peak usage times
- Usage broken down by hours
- Days of the week the space is open
- Number of users
- Associated activities.
- Facilities, e.g., toilets, vending area, café, etc.

Room capacity calculators from the pandemic are still available and offer a useful guide to safer customer numbers in any given area. However, restricting customer numbers runs counter to the idea of a warm welcome, so it is better to ensure that spaces are well organised and easily cleaned than to turn people away. You could consider extending opening hours to spread the load.

The relationship between room sizes and numbers inside is not an exact science. Again, it depends on what people are doing, for example, browsing bookshelves or taking part in collective activities. There is even a difference between genders because men breathe more heavily than women, exhaling more CO_2 and, potentially, airborne viruses so more men means, ideally, lower numbers using the

space. Please also be mindful of fire safety regulations and make sure you do not exceed capacity in this respect.

The table below gives guidance on the number of users in a classroom setting, relative to room size but is equally applicable to community spaces.

Dimensions	Square feet	6 by 6 block	6-foot circle	8 by 8 block	8-foot circle
30 by 30	900	19	24	11	14
30 by 25	750	16	20	9	11
25 by 25	625	13	17	7	9
25 by 20	500	10	13	6	8
20 by 20	400	8	11	5	6

There are rules about workspaces too. Regulation 10 of the Workplace, (Health Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 states that the total volume of a room, when empty, divided by the number of people normally working in it should be at least 11 cubic metres, assuming a height of 3.0m. The figure of 11 cubic metres per person is a minimum and may be insufficient if, for example, much of the room is taken up by furniture, etc.

For a community room, to calculate the number of people you can have safely in at any one time, the guidance is to allow 1m square per person, so in the case of a room with a length of 5m and a width of 17m, the total area is length x width = 85m squared.

Therefore, to calculate maximum occupancy, you use the following formula:

85m2 ÷ 1m2 per person = 85 (max occupancy)

Of course, during the day, you'll have peaks and flows, so this figure is the maximum you can have during busy periods.

3.3 Ventilation

Ventilation remains key to creating safer customer spaces. However, opening windows to let fresh air in will also lower temperatures, and quite dramatically so on colder days. The balance between warmth and safety presents a challenge so please consider the ventilation in your building and conduct a risk assessment if necessary.

People exhale airborne viruses when they breathe out CO_2 and so CO_2 monitors are useful for measuring these levels. A well-ventilated room has CO_2 levels of 600 to 800 ppm (parts per million). Free-standing air filtration units, such as high efficiency filters, can also help to improve air quality, reducing the risk of infection, and can be bought on Ebay or the high street.

Be careful about using fan heaters for a quick warm up as they circulate air and require more ventilation. Organise spaces as openly as possible, for example, remove room dividers to improve the air flow.

3.4 Temperature

The ideal room temperature is not the same for everyone. It depends on how individuals respond to temperatures, what they are wearing, and what they are doing. Young children and the elderly often need a slightly warmer ambient temperature. Long periods sitting still and reading, for example, also make a difference

Below are some basic benchmarks for indoor temperatures:

- **24°C.** Very warm, could be unsafe for heart conditions
- **18-21°C**. Comfortable temperature
- **18°C.** Minimum for being comfortable
- **12-16°C.** Fairly cold, could be unsafe for respiratory conditions
- **12°C.** Cold, could be unsafe for heart conditions
- **9°C.** Very cold, could be a risk for hypothermia.

The basic level of warmth for a healthy person wearing warm clothing is 18°C. This standard is recognised by the World Health Organisation and is the minimum standard in the government's latest UK cold weather plan. Warm spaces should therefore aim for 18 - 20°C as a minimum.

Community spaces may need to set the thermostat higher and allow a more relaxed dress code for staff. Providing coat racks is a good idea but customers should be able to keep their coats on if they wish. It may also be appropriate to offer blankets to those sitting still for any length of time, or near open windows

3.5   Hygiene and Distancing

The warm space will encourage more people into community spaces, who stay longer, so hygiene is really important. You may wish to ensure hand sanitizer is available, and regular cleaning of seating, surfaces and keyboards is essential. Avoid furniture that cannot be wiped clean to minimise infection risks.

Consider a temporary reconfiguration of spaces to accommodate social distancing, for example, between desks and workstations. However, be mindful of the needs of families and other groups who may wish to be together. A combination of different configurations is recommended to provide social, family-friendly, and separate spaces in which different customers will be comfortable and can interact.

Section 4

Travel and Accessibility

It is important that your warm space can be used by everyone and to look at barriers that may prevent this, not just for wheelchair users, but also for visitors with additional or special needs. For example, bright lighting is important for those with visual impairments, while blue LED lights and quieter spaces are more autism friendly. You may also need to give some thought to making space for assistance animals (or indeed other pets!) who may visit with their owners. Some local disability charities may also come and do an accessibility audit of your space.

4.1   Travel

Organisations need to be mindful that travel costs could be a barrier to many potential users, and not only the costs to get to the warm places, but also potentially parking. It is important to consider how you can make it easier for people to get to your space, especially if they live in more remote areas or have a disability. For example:

- **There may be options for community transport (e.g., Driving**

Mobility is a national organisation which may be able to help with transport)

- o **Ensure at your warm place, that you are able to direct users to local bus and train timetables and stops/stations**

- o **You may be able to hire, or loan from a minibus to transport visitors to your venue**

- o **Chiltern Dial-a-Ride**

- o **Bernwode Bus**

- o **Community Impact Bucks**

- o **For other Community Transport initiatives please check the Bucks Online Directory**

There are lots of ways that customers can get to venues such as walking, cycling, public transport, park and ride, driving and car sharing and community transport.

4.2 Disability Considerations

Disabled people, their friends, families, and carers will need to be able to find out where warm spaces are and what facilities are available. For example, they need to know about level access, accessible toilets, parking, public transport, hearing loops, sensory-friendly areas and more.

Having access to trusted disabled access information inspires confidence, breaks down the barriers of exclusion and removes the fear of the unknown, so Euan's Guide is:

- ◯ Producing guidance on making warm spaces more accessible for disabled people

- ◯ Generating a searchable directory of accessible warm spaces by encouraging venues

- ◯ Operating a warm banks list for free on Euan's Guide.

- ◯ Enabling disabled people to find information about accessible warm spaces before visiting and to share their experiences on Euan's Guide to benefit others.

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Section 5

Activities and Promotion

Creating a welcoming space is a great chance to involve people in other activities that can support their wellbeing and sense of connectedness to their local community. Planning a range of fun and engaging activities can be a great way to encourage people into your space, and these can be as simple as quiz or games nights, board games, puzzles, film screenings or a knit and natter.

Regular resources where possible is another huge advantage. So, if you can provide things such as IT and Wi-Fi access, homework clubs, device charging, etc., these can make a significant difference to people's lives. However, you will have to factor in the costs of providing some of these services carefully, given the rise in energy costs. You might plan on having a television in your space, but this also raises the issue of increased noise levels. Busier community spaces will inevitably be noisier and a relaxed approach to this is important.

Serving food and warm drinks is also a good idea, although there may be local licensing requirements if you want to regularly prepare food. Visitors should be allowed to bring in their own flasks. You do not have to manage all of this yourself however, working with partner organisations is a great way to extend the activities and services you offer.

5.1 Activities

Placing some of the below items in your Welcoming Space could be a simple way to engage people in different activities and enable them to make connections with others:

- A jigsaw puzzle where anyone can place a piece or two
- Board games and cards for people to play
- Scrabble game with a few words started on the board
- A giant crossword or wordsearch on a board or wall for people to help to complete
- Colouring sheets and books – for both adults and children

All the above would work equally well for a younger or older audience.

5.2 Volunteers, Staff Care and Safeguarding

While most organisations will have volunteer policies in place, it is important that they are supported and trained properly as they may well come into contact with higher numbers of vulnerable people. You should always avoid having staff working alone in your space.

Buckinghamshire Council can offer MECC training to volunteers. MECC (Making Every Contact Count) is an approach to behaviour change that uses the millions of day-to-day interactions that organisations and people have with other people to support them in making positive changes to their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

If you would like help finding volunteers for your organisation, you can register with the Buckinghamshire Volunteer Matching Service which matches volunteers with roles where they are most needed in the county. You can also find advice on developing and advertising roles, together with key resources on managing volunteers – from developing a volunteering strategy, writing a volunteering agreement to supporting your volunteer's mental wellbeing on the Community Impact Bucks Website

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Taking care of staff and volunteers is also vital because they themselves may be facing financial hardship. You could look at

creating a peer support or buddy scheme where team members can discuss issues that arise, air concerns and even just vent if needed. You may also have team members who may be more vulnerable to Covid and the National Joint Council agreed guidance with employers about how they should be supported.

It is important to make sure that your staff and volunteers have the confidence to interact with a wide range of people and to manage problem behaviour if it arises, and they must be given clear instructions on how to call in extra support if necessary. You should also carry out an assessment of each staff and volunteer role to see if it requires a police check.

This is where a thorough risk assessment is useful to highlight potential issues and try to prepare for them in advance. You will also need to double check to make sure that your insurance covers any new activity you take on.

5.3 How to Promote your Space

While you are working hard to create a safe and welcoming space, it is vital to recognise the significant stigma that many may still feel when coming into your space. The language you use to describe your space, and the way in which you present the services you host there, are vital to reducing these feelings. Terms to avoid would be warm banks, heated rooms, free meals, benefits advice, etc.

Another way to reduce this feeling is to focus on the activities you offer in the space, rather than the fact that they will be held in a warm room. This may mean services you offer that are income related, such as benefits advice or job support, are not highlighted specifically in your communications but spoken about more generally such as 'local services or advice.' You may wish to make a selection of leaflets available. For example, there are a range of useful resources on the Council's Website including our cost of living pages and a leaflet available on our back on track campaign page

There are a range of opportunities to promote/make your space easy to find by registering on the Bucks Online Directory and other useful resources such as the Warm Spaces website.

5.4 Key Resources

With thanks to CILIP, Warm Welcome and other local partners for their contributions to this content. Please see some further helpful resources below.

CILIP Toolkit

Warm Welcome Guidance

Buckinghamshire Funding Search

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