



Winter Night Shelter 2026

Cook's Handbook

Revised and updated 09/09/2025



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Cooking at the Shelter

About our cooks

Cooks should be aware of the safe preparation, cooking and storage of food and **must** hold a current food safety qualification.

We provide food safety training for volunteers who do not have this qualification. You will be contacted about this and there is a webpage with all the details. <https://wyhoc.org.uk/volunteer/night-shelter-2026-training-hub>

You should be confident in cooking for approximately 22 people over a period of 2 hours. We are unable to accurately predict numbers of guests but we have bed spaces for 12 guests and have 8/10 volunteers plus a staff member per evening shift.

What you need to do

Before your shift

If you have any illness, especially diarrhoea and vomiting 48 hours before your shift, you cannot cook. Let your Group Leader know as soon as possible.

Plan meal and quantities.

Plan a main course for 22 guests and volunteers and a vegetarian option for about 4-6. Include a pudding and some fresh fruit.

Our guests appreciate good bread with their meals. See Section 2 for ideas of food that has been cooked in the past. Please ensure that rice is cooked and served immediately on the day.

A helpful rule of thumb is about **£3.50 - £4.00 per head** for the evening meal.

If doing a spicy dish, please provide a lesser spicy version as there are always a small number of guests who do not like spicy food.

You will be advised if any guests have food allergies or preferences.

There is no/limited freezer space at most venues.

You must display a food allergen poster which will be provided.

See the food suggestions list at the end of the handbook. Avoid common allergens (e.g. peanuts) where possible.

Purchasing ingredients

You will need to purchase ingredients yourself, if there is a surplus of ingredients use the WhatsApp group to communicate with fellow cooks to see if they can use it. We also ask if you could 4 pints of milk and 2 loafs of bread for breakfast.

Keep receipts to claim them back. On the day, put any receipts for expenses to be paid in the back pocket in the Shelter Logbook, with your name and bank account details (if it is the first claim).

Preparing for the shift

You can prepare and cook food at home in line with food safety principles.

There should be a supply of large pots and dishes to cook at your venue.

You may want to bring plastic storage containers to take home any left overs.

Your shift Arrive by 6pm.

During the evening:

- Liaise with Night Shelter Coordinator/shift leader regarding any new guest issues that you might need to be aware of.
- Agree with shift leader how best to serve food.
- Check your food temperature using the food probe. See hints and tips on using a food probe.
- Work with your assistant cook to prepare the food for 8pm.
- Don't forget to eat yourself!
- Record temperatures on the food log for the evening

Post meal

- Unless the food has been specifically requested for the night/breakfast, **please dispose of all food**. Either take it home/donate it to fellow volunteers or bin it.
- If you have spread or sauces that could be used the following day/week, label them **night shelter** with the date of opening and store appropriately.
- Clean oven and hob and all surfaces.
- Washing up done and put away. Ask your shift leader to nominate volunteers to help with this.
- Complete the food log form and pass to shift leader to put in pocket in log book.

Health and Safety: Must dos for all cooks

Record keeping and equipment

You **MUST** complete the food event log throughout and at the end of your shift. Copies will be provided.

You may also need to note the temperatures in the venue's own log books.

Make sure you know where all foods, utensils and first aid kits are kept. Your shift leader should help with these if you are unsure.

Items you need such as crockery, cutlery, toaster, jugs, chopping boards and trays should all be provided.

Alarms: Check if the venue has provided any practical advice on fire/steam alarm.

[Fire exits](#) are clearly marked in the building and instructions for emergency are on the Fire Action notices.

Check that you know where the first aid box is kept.

There should be advice on how the cooker is operated close by.

Ovens need to be at high temperature for cooking. Use the [Meat temperature probe and wipes](#) which will be provided.

[Microwaves are available](#) at most venues. Check with your Night Shelter Coordinator

Please [wash and recycle](#) plastic & glass bottles, cans, tetrapak cartons and paper as appropriate.

Put [used tea towels](#) to one side for the morning team to put in with the laundry

Kitchen access

- No guests are allowed in the kitchen.
- Other volunteers should be in the kitchen only as required to assist.
- Wipe down surfaces with antibacterial spray before starting.

Using a Probe

A Probe Thermometer is a thermometer that penetrates the surface of the food, taking the core temperature of the food.

Before taking temperature readings of food:

- Clean, sanitise and dry the thermometer before using it.
- Sanitise the probe of the thermometer by:
 - running the metal tip under hot water (80°C) for 6 seconds
 - washing in a sanitising solution; or
 - using alcohol swabs.

When checking temperatures:

- Check the core temperature of food by inserting the probe into the centre of the food, or the thickest point. Measure liquids at their thickest point.
- Take the reading at least 10 seconds after insertion, when the temperature reading has stabilised.
- Place the thermometer probe between two packages of packed or frozen food items, to take a surface temperature measurement.
- Do not damage packaging when checking the temperature, as this may lead to contamination.

FOOD HYGIENE & KITCHEN SAFETY

You will have covered most of the following in your training but please read the following thoroughly.

COOKING & BAKING:

Personal care: Ensure nails are short, not varnished (chips of varnish can contaminate food, and colour hides dirt under nails), no nail extensions. Take off all jewellery (necklaces, watches, brooches, all rings except plain bands) to prevent falling into food/bringing contaminants. Ensure no loose labels on clothes, etc., that might fall into food.

Then, put on an apron to protect the food from the contaminants on your clothes. Consider a hairnet (even though it looks a bit odd!) if you have long hair.

WASH your hands in the hand-washing basin using liquid soap. Make sure you wash well between the fingers and scrub your nails. Remove stopper from sink before drying your hands - preferably with a paper towel.

1. Wet hands thoroughly
2. Use approved soap
3. Rub palms together

4. Rub the fingers
5. Rub the thumbs
6. Rinse hands thoroughly
7. Use paper towel for drying
8. Turn off the tap using the paper towel

DISINFECT the work surfaces using the kitchen surface cleaner provided.

FOOD PREPARATION:

Chopping boards - choose the right one for the job - they are usually colour coded.

Knives -choose a 'raw' or a 'cooked' knife to avoid contamination. Raw and cooked foods must be kept separate at all times - work in separate parts of the kitchen.

BACTERIA

There are many types of bacteria - two of the most common being salmonella and E-coli 0157. Bacteria are germs we all carry and they are a source of contamination. Bacteria on our skin, in our mouth, nose, ears, hair etc. Bacteria are also in the air, water, soil and on food.

Bacteria in can be killed by treatment – by **HEAT** (e.g. in cooking), **CHEMICALS** (e.g. in cleaning) or **IRRADIATION** (as used in the food processing industry).

Bacteria cause food poisoning and it is our job to prevent this. To prevent bacteria passing from us we should **wear protective clothing** e.g. a clean apron; a hairnet if hair is long.

The main **HIGH RISK FOODS** are:

- All cooked meat and poultry.
- Cooked meat products including gravy and stock.
- Milk, cream, artificial cream, custards and dairy produce.

- Cooked eggs and products made from eggs e.g. mayonnaise.
- Shellfish and other seafood.
- Cooked rice.

Bacteria multiply with

- Warmth
- Moisture
- Food
- Time

Bacteria can multiply every ten minutes and grow in the danger zone. The **DANGER ZONE** is between 5° C and 63° C. Therefore **ONE** bacterium becomes **ONE THOUSAND** in only 1 hour 40 minutes.

Their preference for growth is 37° C - blood heat. This is the most dangerous temperature.

TEMPERATURE.

To keep food in good condition **high risk COLD FOOD should be kept below 5° C and high risk HOT FOOD over 63° C.** Bacteria will not grow when frozen at -18° C but are still there and will start to multiply when thawed out. If your organisation is designated to record the fridge/freezer temperature regularly, please do so when the fridge is first used.

FOOD POISONING. The top 10 causes are:

- Food prepared too far in advance and stored at room temperature, i.e. not refrigerated
- Cooling food too slowly prior to refrigeration
- Not re-heating food to high enough temperatures to destroy food poisoning bacteria
- The use of cooked food contaminated with food poisoning bacteria
- Undercooking
- Not thawing frozen poultry for sufficient time
- Cross-contamination from raw food to cooked food
- Storing food below 63 °C
- Infected food handlers

- Use of left-overs – DON'T unless you know it is safe

Bacteria can be passed by:

- Hands
- Clothes and equipment
- Hand contact surfaces
- Food contact surfaces

Make sure the same utensils are not used for both raw and cooked food. They must be properly washed between the uses of raw/cooked food.

ILLNESS.

Should you be unwell in any way (sickness, diarrhoea etc.), do not prepare food on or for use at our premises. Ask someone else to cover for you. Any cuts should be completely covered with a plaster - preferably blue or green - which seals round the wound. Do not use strip dressings as germs can escape from the open ends.

CONTAMINATION Food can be contaminated by:

- People
- Raw food
- Insects
- Rodents
- Dust
- Refuse, waste food
- Animals, birds

If you should see any indication of insects, rodents, animals or birds in the church kitchen, notify staff immediately.

COOKING and REHEATING FOOD

When food is cooked from fresh, the **centre of the item must reach 75° C**. Re-heating food must be heated to a temperature in the centre of 82° C.

A probe thermometer is available in the kitchen for this purpose and you must check that reheated food reaches this temperature.

The probe must be wiped with **BACTERICIDAL** disinfectant before and after use. Hot food must be served above 63° C and can only be reheated once.

KEEPING FOOD not for immediate use.

All food should be kept as cool as possible. Halls are well heated in winter for comfort but, for food, it can be a disaster.

Keep high-risk food in the kitchen which is usually cooler than a hall.

Also, food should be kept covered. This applies also to providing food available to snack on. Individual items which are not wrapped should be in covered containers and tongs/spoons **MUST** be used not fingers.

FRIDGE

In the fridge, please **keep raw and ready-to-eat food separate**. Raw food should always be on the lowest shelf of the fridge. There will be a thermometer in the fridge and the temperature, when opened first thing in the morning, should not exceed 5° C. If it exceeds this, please let staff know.

DAIRY

We love it and so do the bugs, because of its high fat content. **Cream should only be out of the fridge for 15 minutes**. If homemade cream cakes are to be served, for instance, bring the pastry part, whip the cream in the kitchen and fill the cakes shortly before they will be eaten.

LEFT OVER FOOD AND INGREDIENTS

Do not leave in the fridge in the hopes that others will use. Preferably take it home or dispose of it. It may seem wasteful, but it is safer. Out of date or opened cartons of anything can pose significant health risk. If you leave something

for a while in the fridge (or freezer) to be collected later please bag it and put your name and the date on it. Otherwise it may be thrown away by staff! If left for long it may still be binned!

CROCKERY & CUTLERY when handling dishes etc.

- Do not handle any part which will be in touch with anyone's mouth
- Fingers should be outside cups. Use the handles when setting cups/mugs out
- Only handle cutlery by the handle.
- Teaspoons in a dish should have the handles protruding to enable people to help themselves
- Disposable cups should be taken from the base of the tube to prevent your fingers going inside the cup
- Dishes which become cracked or chipped must be thrown out.

WORK METHODICALLY, clear up as you go along.

DRYING UP

Clean tea towels must be used or dishes left to air-dry (the latter is preferable to avoid cross contamination).

BEFORE LEAVING: WORK SURFACES, sinks **AND FLOORS** must be disinfected after cooking with appropriate cleaners (bactericidal disinfectant for work surfaces, and a 'Cif' type of cleaner for the cooker top.

WASTE IN BINS: If you have generated waste (and especially food waste that may begin to smell) it should be removed. Please compress the black bin liner (to reduce its volume) and knot it and remove it to an external bin or take home. Then replace with a clean bin liner from the kitchen drawer.

FINALLY, please remember we all **BORROW the kitchen** and need to leave it in a good and safe.

Food ideas based on menus from past shelters

Mains

Chicken dishes
Chicken Chasseur with potatoes & veg.
Chicken Tagine
Chicken casserole
Chicken & leek pie, rice, potatoes, vegs,
Chicken, leek & sweetcorn in sauce, with pasta, cabbage and carrots,
Roast chicken wrapped in bacon trimmings,
Chicken, mash potatoes, cauli & broc & cheese sauce, sugar snaps,
Chicken ratatouille, rice & peas
Pasta bake (chicken)
Chicken & potato bake, vegs
Moroccan chicken & couscous
Shepherd's pie
Corned beef hash, spring greens, carrots, peas,
Mincemeat with spaghetti
Beef Lasagne
Beef, potato & veg. hash
Beef & leek casserole
Turkey, mushroom & leek pie

Fish pie & veg
Lamb, mashed potato and roast, vegs,
Roast pork
Pork/spinach in Béchamel/cheese sauce
Sausage casserole
Tuna pasta bake
Roast turkey with trimmings, roast vegs

Vegetarian mains

Spinach & cheese pie
Vegetarian shepherd's pie
Veggie sausage and bean casserole
Vegetarian chilli
Veg. lasagne & green salad
Quorn casserole, leek & sweetcorn in sauce, with pasta, cabbage and carrots
Vegetable pie with chick peas, cauliflower & broccoli
Quorn Tagine,
Vegetable paella

Desserts

Apple strudel & custard
Banoffee pie & cream
Apple pie or crumble & custard
Sponge pudding with peaches & custard
Banana & choc. chip cake/walnut cake
Cake & custard – any variety
Tinned fruit cocktail & custard
Fruit pie with cream.
Selection of cakes
Bread & butter pudding
Cherry tart & custard
Fruit & custard
Trifle or pavlova
Rice pudding

Fruits of the forest crumble with custard.

Rhubarb & strawberry mousse

Swiss roll & cream.

Pineapple sponge & custard

Bakewell tart & custard

Fresh fruit

Chocolate pudding.

Breakfast

Porridge

Croissants

Toast with butter or jam

Breakfast pack to go (this can include a drink, cereal bar, fruit)

Appendix 1

Food Safety Log: Winter Night Shelter

Session date:

Location:

Name of Shift Leader:

Name of Cook:

Name of Assistant Cook:

Number of people catered for:



Details of meal served	
Main course	
Dessert	

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List of ingredients

Please tick any allergens that may have been in the meal			
Celery/celeriac		Molluscs	
Cereals containing gluten		Mustard	
Crustaceans		Nuts	
Eggs		Peanuts	
Fish		Sesame seeds	
Lupin		Soya	

Milk		Sulphur Dioxide/Sulphites	
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Fridge/Freezer temperature: Check at start of shift and once during the shift					
Appliance:	Check 1		Check 2		Notes/action taken
	Time	Temp	Time	Temp	
Fridge					
Freezer					

Food Temperature				
Food item	Cooking / reheating (>75°C for 2 mins)	Cooling (under 5°C within 90 mins)	Holding (hot > 65°C) (cold ≤ 5°C)	Notes
	Cooking / reheating temp	Cooling temp	Holding temp	

Kitchen left clean and tidy at end of shift and all close down tasks completed	Cook's initials
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I, shift cook, confirm the food has been purchased, stored, prepared and served following the requirements and guidance as per Level 2 Food Safety and Hygiene training.	Cook's initials
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