

**WYCOMBE  
HOMELESS  
CONNECTION**



# **WINTER NIGHT SHELTER 2026**

## **SHIFT LEADER HANDBOOK**

Revised and updated October 2025

To be read with the general volunteer handbook



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## 1. Introduction

This handbook has been prepared to give you some essential information about being a shift leader at the WHC Winter Night Shelter.

While you'll go through most of the content of this handbook at training, it contains a lot of the information you'll need to refer back to and spend more time with.

Please also read the general volunteer handbook on our website which contains more information including health and safety, manual handling, why we need the shelter and more.

## 2. Important contact details

WHC Office: 01494 447699 (Mon – Fri, 9am – 5pm)

Your Group leader contact details will be on emails from them and circulated separately.

## 3. Before the shift

You will be given a list of who is on your shift, and their emergency contact details, by your Group Leader or a staff member before your shift.

Think about the team, especially if you have anyone who is on their first ever shift. Take time to show them the ropes. Remember to take into account any accessibility needs your team may have, this info will be shared with you ahead of time.

## 4. Briefings

Good communication is important for the safe working of the shelter. Shift leaders will brief their teams at the start of each shift and debrief at the end.

### Briefings

- Any relevant info about each guest
- Who is in which bed
- Any special support needs, dietary needs or anything else to be aware of.
- Stress the need for confidentiality.
- Shift leader will allocate roles
- Ensure all understand fire arrangements;
- Walkie talkie and shelter phone usage;
- Welcome new volunteers
- Explain activities for the shift

Roles to be allocated include smoking breaks, new volunteers' buddy, outside with staff members, booking in guests, supervising showers (as appropriate) and initial hospitality.

### Debriefs

- Ensure all volunteers have a chance to discuss anything of concern before going home.
- Ensure volunteers have safe leaving arrangements.

### Timings of briefings and debriefings

**6:45pm briefing:** On duty Night Shelter Coordinator with evening shift leader briefs evening team.

**9:30pm briefing:** Arriving overnight shift leader and overnight team have briefing with evening shift leader and night shelter coordinator.

**9:45pm debrief** Evening shift leader debriefs evening team when overnight team are free to take over.

**6:30am briefing:** Morning shift leader and morning team arrives for briefing with overnight shift leader. Overnight shift leader to appoints a deputy to manage shift whilst this is happening.

**6:45am debrief:** Overnight shift leader debriefs overnight team once morning team are free to take over

**7:45am debrief:** Morning shift leader debriefs their team.

## 5. Top tips for running a good and safe shifts

Shift leaders don't get too involved in any one situation, but monitor and oversee what's happening, making sure everyone knows what their jobs are and are doing them!

There will be a staff member present on some evenings and mornings. You will be able to collaborate with them.

Overnight they will be on call and you will be able to make decisions about whether you need to call on them. See section 7 for more details.

### You will be responsible for four main areas

#### Volunteers

- We always work as a team. Keep an eye on the volunteers in your team to ensure they haven't ended up alone with someone.
- Ensure each volunteer has a job to do:
  - Welcoming guests inside with staff members and accompanying guests on smoking breaks.
  - Buddying up with new volunteers.
  - Booking in guests.

- Supervising the queue for showers (as appropriate).
- Socialising and hospitality.
- Ensure that volunteers are being safe. For example:
  - Volunteers cleaning up should wear gloves.
  - Sharps bin should be out on display and then put away at the end of the morning shift.

### **Logbooks and records**

- Logbook: write in the logbook before the end of your shift. Follow instructions inside the logbook to help you ensure all necessary records have been made (always ensure that the logbook is safe under your care or in a non-guest area).
- Check the cook, if present, has made all their notes as needed
- Keep personal data safe. Please ensure that guest lists are in the pocket in the logbook.
- Accidents to be logged in venue log book and in the shelter log book.
- Safeguarding forms filled in if necessary.

### **Guests**

- Be familiar with the house rules and if necessary challenge anyone who is not abiding by them.
- Keep an overview of where everyone is in the building and where the guests are.
- Ensure that guests remain in the designated area for the night shelter (i.e. not going into the kitchen or other parts of the building).
- Keep an eye on the toilets and showers (time taken, only one person in a cubicle).
- Make sure smokers are accompanied and guests are not outside the building on their own.

### **Facilities**

- Know where the fire exits are and the evacuation procedure.
- Take a roll call and ensure everyone is out if a fire occurs.
- Ensure all is clear and clean and tidy. Has the oven and surfaces been cleaned and all food disposed of? Ensure showers and toilets clean.
- Locking and unlocking – to be in line with advice for the venue.

## **6. Instructions on handling challenging scenarios**

Shift leaders can sometimes be faced with some challenging situations. Whilst it isn't possible to have written instructions for every scenario the following are issues which have been faced in the past.

### **Smoking breaks at night**

It is WHC policy that volunteers shouldn't ever be on their own with guests. Once the evening shift have left and two of the night shift volunteers have gone to sleep it is not possible to bring guests outside for a smoking break and maintain this policy whilst also having someone present and awake within the shelter.

If a client is becoming difficult to handle and you are sure that allowing them out for a cigarette is going to be an effective way of calming them down, you would have to wake up one of the sleeping night shift volunteers in order to have sufficient numbers awake to do this. This isn't ideal but it's permissible if you feel that the situation calls for it. It's not permissible to have a volunteer on their own with a guest or to have no one awake inside the shelter though.

### **Letting guests in late**

Allowing guests' access into the Night Shelter is one of the primary responsibilities of the Shift Leader or Night Shelter Coordinator whilst they are present. Once the Night Shelter Coordinator has left, we would like volunteers to ensure that they do not let anyone else come inside unless it has been arranged in advance with the staff or the staff member is contacted to check.

### **Letting guests out and back in**

It is WHC policy that once a client has left the building unattended they will not be allowed back in during that night. It is important to allow people to leave the building if they ask to leave but we do expect volunteers to ensure that no one is allowed back in if they have left unattended.

### **Guests asking to sleep in other areas of buildings**

From time to time we have had guests who have found it difficult to get to sleep in the room with all the other people and sometimes they have asked

permission to sleep in another part of the building where they can be on their own away from noise or other people causing them anxiety. We would ask volunteers to ensure that no one is allowed to sleep somewhere that they cannot be seen by the two volunteers who are awake or blocking a corridor/ fire escape route. If your venue allows you to be creative in where you allow a guest in this situation to sleep then it's within your power to do that so long as you keep to the rules above.

### **Illegal drugs or alcohol**

It is very important that we maintain our rule that no one is allowed to bring illegal drugs or alcohol in to a Night Shelter venue. This means that anyone caught with them will be asked to leave.

If illegal drugs are found in the venue and it's not obvious who they belong to then the police should be called to deal with them on the non-urgent number.

If alcohol is found this should be disposed of and not given back to the guest.

Call 999 if you are facing difficulties with a client who has illegal drugs or alcohol on them and won't leave/wants to take them. Don't put yourself in danger, it's the police's responsibility to deal with them.

## **7. Unusual or emergency situations**

You **MUST** make sure that you or a delegated member of your team calls the on-duty Night Shelter Coordinator or staff member in the following circumstances and in these situations the staff member will make decisions/take action as necessary:

- If the **emergency services have to be called**.
- If **someone turns up late** (alone/with the police/with another agency) and you think there may be grounds to admit them.
- If you **find alcohol or drugs** in the shelter.
- If you **end up in a situation where there could be less than three volunteers** on the premises for any reason.

Remember the on duty staff member is there to support you in your role. You can call, for example:

- If someone is beginning to **present difficult behavior** but it doesn't warrant calling out the emergency services.
- If you are **uncomfortable or unhappy about something and need support** or a second opinion about a decision to take.

**Call the emergency services sooner rather than later if you think you may need them.** It's better for them to turn up once a situation has already blown over than to come too late and things have deteriorated further. Examples include

- If someone refuses to leave the premises when asked then a volunteer should call the police straight away, the police should come and remove them.
- If someone becomes ill or is injured and needs attention, it is better to call the ambulance than to have someone take them to hospital.

#### **Dealing with any non-emergency visits from the police:**

At WHC we have a very good relationship with the local police and we are keen to ensure that this continues. We work closely with them year round and we rely on them for help if anything goes wrong but this doesn't mean that it is never okay to question or challenge them.

If the police turn up and there are no staff members on site you are responsible for ensuring that our rules and our ethos are still adhered to:

- **You do not have to let the police inside the building to check on guests or ask them questions unless they have a warrant.** If guests are happy to talk to them then that is fine. If not then please do not allow them to come inside. If you need some help with this then please call the Night Shelter Coordinator on duty, you will be able to pass the phone to the police and they can talk to them if necessary.
- **Please do not allow the police to drop people off at the Night Shelter at night.** Call the on-duty staff member for help if you need.

#### **Ensuring that volunteers are supported if something distressing happens.**

Volunteering at the night shelter is often a very rewarding way to spend your time but there is always a possibility that volunteers will experience something challenging. Sometimes guests present us with difficult behavior or get angry



and frustrated with us, sometimes guests want to open up and share with us and tell us things about their lives that are upsetting. Whatever it is, it is important that we ensure that the volunteers feel looked after and cared for if they are distressed by anything that happens whilst they are volunteering with us.

- If someone is distressed and cannot carry on with the shift, then they should be allowed to leave. If you are then left with too few volunteers on shift, then you may need to call the on-duty staff member.
- Volunteers may require the chance to talk about a difficult interaction, make sure they get a chance to do this before they leave if possible.
- If you feel that someone may need follow-up support after a difficult interaction, then please ensure that the Volunteering Coordinator knows about this.

## 8. Safeguarding

If you become aware of a safeguarding concern you have a responsibility to act.

A safeguarding concern may be something you have witnessed, something someone has disclosed to you or an accusation someone has made which fits into one of the following categories:

- Physical abuse
- Domestic violence or abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Psychological or emotional abuse
- Financial or material abuse
- Modern slavery
- Discriminatory abuse
- Organisational or institutional abuse
- Neglect or acts of omission
- Self-neglect

If you or any of the volunteers on shift become aware of a safeguarding issue please take the following steps:

1. Deal with any emergencies first. If you need to call the emergency services do this before worrying about anything else.

2. Make some notes. There will be safeguarding forms at the venue which will prompt you for the specific details you should record. Record the facts, not opinions.
3. There will also be envelopes available along with the safeguarding forms. Once you have filled in the safeguarding form put it into the envelope. This should be marked as being for the attention of the Services Manager unless they are implicated in the issue in some way in which case it should be labelled as for the attention of the CEO.

The full WHC safeguarding policy is on our website and more detail can be found in the night shelter general volunteer handbook.

## 9. Shift leader checklist

Please ensure that you are familiar with the duties involved in the shift leader role. Read through the shift leader handbook before your first shift. A copy of the shift leader handbook and this checklist will be in the Night Shelter Log Book which the night shelter coordinator will bring to the venue and collect in the morning.

### All shifts

At all times, the shift leader should be keeping an eye on what is going on the shift. This will require quite a bit of time on your feet, walking between any areas of the shelter which are in separate rooms if that applies to your venue, checking volunteers are okay, ensuring guests are not going into restricted areas etc. Avoid taking on any job which would prevent you from doing this whilst guests are in the building.

### Evening shift

**Setting up:** All volunteers apart from cooks will help to set up the beds, dinner tables, towels (at venues with a shower) and any other equipment needed. Generally, there is 45 minutes to an hour to get all this done which should be more than enough with everyone helping. Ensure that those who are handling equipment are doing so safely (and night shelter coordinators or driver will help here).

**Briefing:** Make sure all volunteers, including cooks have come and listened to the briefing.

**On the door/going down to Oakley Hall if at an out of town venue:** Two volunteer should be allocated to help the on the door. This role requires someone confident to help manage any tricky situations, make sure bags have been checked and breath tests completed.

**Signing in:** Two volunteers should be allocated to help get guests signed in once they have been let inside. They should ask guests to read the rules and agree to them as the sign in.

**Managing showers:** One volunteer should be asked to manage showers if it is a venue which has showers. They should sit with the two who are helping with signing people in and ask guests if they'd like to have a shower. They should create a list and ensure that guests are using the showers in order and not taking too long (calculate this by dividing two hours by however many guests want a shower – if all 12 want one they will have to take 10 minutes each).

**Cleaning up/ tidying up:** Once the meal has been eaten around half the volunteers should be allocated to helping to clear up, cleaning up and tidying up the venue (this could include putting tables away etc.).

**Writing up logs:** Collaborate with the Night Shelter Coordinator (if at venue) to make sure logs are written up. Start with the main log sheet and use the information at the bottom of that to see which other logs need doing.

**Debriefing:** Ensure all volunteers are present for debrief, this is an important final part of the shift. Ask volunteers if anything occurred during the shift which caused them any concern or if there is anything they would like to discuss before they leave. Ensure everyone has had a chance to speak.

## **Night Shift**

**Laying out breakfast:** Shortly before lights go out at 11pm one or two volunteers should lay out breakfast on a table where they can see it.

**Sleeping:** The shift leader should agree which volunteers will take the first sleep (from 11pm until 2:30am) and which should take the second (from 2:30am until 5:30am).

**Contacting on-call staff member or emergency services:** If there is an incident during the Night the shift leader should be woken up immediately if they are asleep to help deal with it. If the emergency services are required any volunteer should contact them immediately but the shift leader should make the decision to call the on-call staff member if that is necessary.

**Writing up logs:** Ensure anything which needs to be added to the logs from the Night Shift has been done. Start with the main log sheet and use the information at the bottom of that to see which other logs need doing.

**Debriefing:** Ensure all volunteers are present for debrief, this is an important final part of the shift. Ask volunteers if anything occurred during the shift which caused them any concern or if there is anything they would like to discuss before they leave. Ensure everyone has had a chance to speak.

## **Morning shift**

**Briefing:** Ensure all volunteers are present for the briefing at the start of the shift.

**Waking guests up:** Two volunteers should be assigned to wake guests up. This should be done gently without touching guests who are asleep. The lights should be turned up at 6:30am. Attempt to wake guests up verbally who are still asleep by 7am. If any guests remain asleep by 7:15am try a gentle tap of their mattress with your foot is the last resort to get them up. If anyone cannot be woken consider whether there is a medical issue and emergency services should be called, collaborate with the staff member (if at the venue) to decide what to do.

**Supervising breakfast:** Two volunteers should be assigned to supervising breakfast. This will be simple porridge pots, cereal bars, croissants etc. the aim for these volunteers will be to ensure that everyone has taken something if they want it and that no one is taking unreasonable amounts of food.

**Ensuring guests are all out on time:** Two volunteers should be assigned to checking that guests have left the building. Use the sign in sheet to ensure people are ticked out so that we don't accidentally leave anyone behind in the venue.

**Logs:** Collaborate with the Night Shelter Coordinator (if at venue) to make sure all logs are completed. Start with the main log sheet and use the information at the bottom of that to see which other logs need doing.

**Debriefing:** Once all guests are out ensuring all volunteers are present for debrief, this is an important final part of the shift. Ask volunteers if anything occurred during the shift which caused them any concern or if there is anything they would like to discuss before they leave. Ensure everyone has had a chance to speak.

**Cleaning and tidying venue and packing van:** All volunteers should work to clean and tidy the venue and ensure all equipment is back on the van. Ensure that volunteers are lifting any equipment safely (and night shelter coordinators will help here). The aim is that by 8:30am everything is packed away, the venue is cleaned, anything we have moved from the venue is put away, all lights turned off and the door locked.