

An advice note for PCCs:

**Re: Fire-Risk Assessment and Health and Safety Policy / “Responsible Persons”**

I would like to advise PCCs about some work I have done with Ecclesiastical Insurance Group (EIG) on the right ways for a PCC to ensure that they are reviewing their Fire-Risk Assessment and their Health and Safety Policy. This is important, because ensuring that fire-risk and health and safety assessments are regularly undertaken is obviously essential both to ensure the safety of people and because not doing so could well invalidate insurance cover.

For some years PCCs have generally appointed a “Responsible Person” to take a lead in doing this work in both areas. However, it was pointed out to me by a Churchwarden that, in law, the “Responsible Person” for Fire Risk Assessment and Health and Safety has a very specific legal meaning. For churches, the Responsible Person is actually the PCC as a body. However confusing it is to have a term which says “person” but means “all”, this is the case.

The PCC therefore need to take responsibility for these matters as a body. However, pragmatically:

1. PCCs usually need to agree that one or more members will act as “competent persons” for Fire Rick Assessment, to ensure that the PCC undertake the necessary assessment, and take the preventative and protective measures necessary.
2. It is advisable for a member of PCC to lead on Health and Safety (often called a Health and Safety Officer) to remind the PCC of their responsibilities and ensure that they meet them.

My suggestion for PCCs is that it may be helpful to take the two practical steps just mentioned, but – for the reasons above – now avoid calling those who take a lead on Fire Risk Assessment and Health and Safety “Responsible Persons”.

EIG have updated their very helpful templates for PCCs on these matters to ensure that PCCs are aware that they are corporately “Responsible Persons” but that nominating one or more people to lead in these areas can be wise. See:

<https://www.ecclesiastical.com/documents/church-fire-risk-assessment.pdf>

<https://www.ecclesiastical.com/documents/church-health-and-safety-policy-template.pdf>

*The Ven Archdeacons Rick Simpson and Libby Wilkinson, 11.3.25*