
Safety of Ladders and other high-level access arrangements

1. Identifying the risk

The PCC is responsible for ensuring (as far as practicable) the safety of people who use the church building, including worshippers, visitors, volunteers and contractors. The PCC should therefore

- ensure it is aware of its responsibilities
- make sure insurance cover is in place and up-to-date
- appoint a health and safety officer or sub-committee
- carry out a risk assessment for any high-level access arrangements
- consult with those who currently use the access, e.g. the QI architect or surveyor; bellringers; the person who maintains the clock

2. Managing the risk

- **The need to use a difficult access should be reduced as far as possible.**
 - If the regular reason for climbing up a tower ladder is to wind the clock, then we would strongly encourage the PCC to install an automatic winding system. This does not affect the actual clock mechanism, but removes the need to access the clock except for maintenance or repair. [See for example: <http://www.smithofderby.com/heritage/products-and-services/church-clock-automatic-winding/>.] This would need a faculty but should be straightforward.
 - It may be that for occasional access to the clock and bells, an alternative access arrangement can be used, e.g. cherry picker or tower scaffold. The ladder could then be removed entirely.
 - For other high-level works, e.g. inspection of tower stonework, a drone could be used as an alternative to a specialist abseiling firm.
- **Improvements to the access should be considered**
 - Wooden ladders should be regularly checked for damage or decay and should preferably be replaced, unless they are of recognised historical interest.
 - It may be possible to provide grab-rails; a handrail; landings to allow safe opening of a trap door; additional trap doors to reduce falling distance, etc
- **People using a difficult access should be fit to do so.**
 - This needs local management to ensure that anyone who is infirm does not climb the ladder.
 - It may be necessary to prevent climbing e.g. by children when the access is not in use, for example by locked boards across the base of a ladder (like scaffolding security boards)
- **People using a difficult access should be trained and ready to use safety equipment.**
 - If the ladder is needed for occasional access, then it may be best to fit a wire for a safety harness, but the PCC would need to make sure that people actually use that equipment properly and safely.
 - The harness and safety system would need to be inspected annually and certified safe (presumably by the supplier of the equipment)

- We understand there are time limits for how long someone can be left dangling on a harness before a rescue is effected – the parish will need to be aware of this potential liability.
- People using a difficult access should always be accompanied by a second person.

For further advice, please contact the church insurer. In most cases this is Ecclesiastical Insurance, who produce helpful guidance:

<https://www.ecclesiastical.com/churchmatters/churchguidance/churchhealthandsafety/index.aspx>

Additional information and advice is available from the DAC team:

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