



UNITED GRAND LODGE
OF ENGLAND

THE ALMONER'S GUIDE



Masonic
Charitable Foundation

This guide has been produced by United Grand Lodge of England with the assistance of the Masonic Charitable Foundation for the benefit of Metropolitan, Provincial and Lodge Almoners. It is endorsed by the Grand Master's Council Charity Committee and supported by the MCF.

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Glossary of terms

Grand Master's Council Charity Committee - GMCCC
Masonic Charitable Foundation - MCF
Provincial Communications Officer - PCO
United Grand Lodge of England – UGLE

INTRODUCTION

This guide has been prepared by UGLE with support from the MCF to assist Metropolitan, Provincial and Lodge Almoners to undertake their important roles. It highlights the key issues which have been known to arise and signposts the reader to tips and advice as well as additional resources where more detailed information is explored on a particular topic.

One of the core values of Freemasonry is to look after the welfare of Freemasons and their family members. As part of a support team, the Metropolitan, Provincial and Lodge Almoners make a vital contribution to the realisation of this value. As the main focal point, often in times of stress and high emotion, these are challenging roles, but they are also highly rewarding ones which are truly valued by those who need support. We hope that this guide will assist you in the effective delivery of your role.

The following pages include frequent references to pastoral care which is at the heart of the Almoner's role. The term has different meanings for different people, but, in the context of this guide, we are defining it as 'providing emotional and practical support to brethren and their immediate family'.

For your personal wellbeing and those whom you support, it is important that you understand the need to follow the simple wellbeing advice and lone visiting principles contained within this guide, as well as being aware of the things to look out for. Ensuring wellbeing is important and is about being aware of vulnerable adults, children and young people and taking appropriate steps to protect them from physical and emotional harm.

On behalf of us all, thank you for taking on this important role and for making a real difference.

1. THE ROLE OF THE METROPOLITAN AND PROVINCIAL GRAND ALMONER

The welfare of our members and their dependents is deeply ingrained within the principles of Freemasonry. Building from the bottom upwards, through its Lodges, the organisation provides a support structure designed to underpin this principle.

The role of the Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner is mission critical to ensure that the necessary technical skills are transferred to Lodge Almoners and that organisational support is easily accessible.

Whilst there are core components, the role varies from one Province to another depending on the make-up of that Province and the priorities and challenges that the Provincial Grand Master has identified to ensure success of his Lodges and members.

To be successful requires energy, expertise and certain skills that will need to be employed in their fullest measure.

The core components of the role and responsibilities include:

CORE ROLE

- To work with the Metropolitan/Provincial Executive and assist the MCF on agreeing and implementing policy in relation to member welfare.
- To oversee and encourage brethren in all matters relating to member welfare within the Province.
- To provide support, guidance and advice to all Lodge Almoners and Visiting Volunteers in the Province, as well as overseeing various requests for assistance.
- To liaise with the MCF Advice and Support Team (AST).

RESPONSIBILITIES

- To use best endeavours to assist members of the Province or from other Provinces who live within the Province and/or their dependants in need of practical and financial support.
- To dedicate time to helping people locally with access to local sources of help, both practical and financial, and to support MCF's Visiting Volunteers in the execution of their duties in facilitating applications for support from the MCF.
- To undertake the duties outlined in the procedures, guidelines and information for acting Metropolitan/Provincial officers, including within the Almoner's Guide, issued (and updated from time to time) by UGLE and MCF.
- To work with UGLE/MCF, attend workshops, regional groups and conferences when possible.
- To communicate and meet regularly with Lodge Almoners to coordinate their activities, to share best practice and provide assistance/training where required so as to provide the best possible pastoral support to brethren and their families in the Province.
- To be the conduit between the Province and the MCF in respect of any request from a member of the Province or his dependants.
- To build relationships with counterparts of the Regional Communications Groups and/or with neighbouring Provinces will also be beneficial.

The above list is not exhaustive and the items are covered in more detail in other sections of this guide. One of the most important duties is to build positive relationships with members of the Metropolitan/Provincial Executive, with Lodge Almoners and of course with members, whilst realistically managing any expectations that they may have. This should be done in an amiable, caring and sensitive way.

INDUCTION

An induction should ideally be undertaken prior to appointment, to provide a good understanding of the purpose of the role, the expectation of the office and to enable a newly appointed Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner to commence his activities, thus ensuring a smooth handover from his predecessor.

The induction should clearly outline the purpose of the office and the value it can add to a Province if conducted correctly. On behalf of and supported by UGLE, the MCF will offer induction sessions for Metropolitan and Provincial Grand Almoners throughout the year. Inductions will cover the following:

- Role of the Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner.
- How best to support Metropolitan and Provincial Executives.
- How to manage and support Lodge Almoners.
- When to communicate appropriate welfare news and what information to include.
- Working with the Provincial Communication Officer, MCF and UGLE communications teams.
- Sharing ideas that have worked well.
- Knowing the key personnel and contacts at UGLE and MCF.
- Wellbeing and lone visiting principles when encountering vulnerable adults, children and young people.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

Metropolitan and Provincial Grand Almoners conference

On behalf of UGLE, the MCF hosts a biennial conference for Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoners. The two-day conference is a useful opportunity for delegates to receive training and support, updates and useful information from the MCF, UGLE and external organisations. It also provides a forum for discussion and ideas sharing as well as a chance to socialise with peers from across the Provinces.

The Metropolitan and Provincial Grand Almoners are invited to attend with one other representative accompanying them.

Training

In support of UGLE, the MCF provides training to assist Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoners in understanding and delivering this important role. It will cover general or targeted aspects of the role and will include wellbeing and lone visiting guidance, good practice tips, things to look out for and signposting to sources of additional help.

Online resources

There are numerous documents, leaflets and forms of guidance available to download from the MCF website. In addition there is a dedicated MCF You Tube channel, Facebook page and Twitter feed.

For more information visit **mcf.org.uk/almoner**

WORKING WITH THE METROPOLITAN/PROVINCIAL GRAND CHARITY STEWARD

The Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner and Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Charity Steward roles are somewhat interlinked and an understanding as well as a close working relationship between the two officers will certainly add value to the success of the Province. The Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner should work closely with the Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Charity Steward in ensuring a consistent approach to areas in which the roles overlap.

2. THE ROLE OF THE LODGE ALMONER

The role of a Lodge Almoner can be challenging but at the same time very rewarding. The Lodge Almoner will need to devote significant time and energy to his duties. The position is one which benefits from experience and continuity and it is suggested to commit to the role for around five years.

Every Lodge is free to decide what tasks the Almoner will take on, however the list below sets out those which are most typical:

- Keeping in regular contact with brethren and their families, so they know where to turn to in times of need. This includes brethren who have resigned, widowed partners and others.
- Listening carefully to individual needs and being open and honest about the assistance available.
- Highlighting the support available from the state, Masonic charities and other organisations and helping to initiate contact.
- Recognising cases of loneliness and helping to find resolutions.
- Working closely with other Lodge officers and members. For example, in conjunction with the Proposer, Secunder and Lodge Mentor making new members feel welcome or following up with Lodge members who are not attending meetings.
- Ensuring a smooth and detailed handover to a successor.

TIPS AND ADVICE

1. SUCCESSFUL CONVERSATIONS

Establishing a rapport

Identifying similarities in experiences is a good way to quickly build a rapport with someone. During initial conversation look for clues. For example, do they have a pet? Do they have grandchildren or other relatives? Have they mentioned an interest in gardening or a TV programme? If in doubt, a good starting point can be shared experiences of Freemasonry.

Listening and gathering information

Encouraging an individual to open up and share information about their life can feel like a daunting task, but there are many techniques and approaches to help put people at ease and guide discussions.

Active listening: Listening is a vital skill which takes work. Sometimes we hear the words but miss the underlying message. There are a few simple ways to stay engaged with a conversation and improve listening skills.

- Don't prepare a response internally whilst the other person is still speaking. Something important may be missed.
- Demonstrate listening with body language and occasional responses (e.g. "I see"). A smile and a nod of the head can demonstrate interest in what the person is saying and help to encourage the other person to keep speaking.
- Be empathetic. Phrases like "How did you feel about that?" or "What were you feeling when that happened?" help to build an understanding of how the person is feeling.

Ask questions: Avoid questions which invite a yes/no response.

To encourage fuller responses try mirroring the person's language. For example, "You say you feel concerned?" or "Tell me more".

Paraphrase: Repeat information back using your own terms to show you have listened and truly understood a situation.

Summarise: At the end of the conversation, it is helpful to summarise what has been said and the next steps that have been agreed with the person.

Further resources

calebstorkey.com/listening-skills-11-steps-to-become-a-good-listener/
thebalancecareers.com/active-listening-skills-with-examples-2059684

Speaking to the bereaved or somebody dealing with a trauma

The following pointers are helpful when supporting somebody who is bereaved or dealing with a trauma:

- Act naturally and be genuine whilst remembering to take cues from them.
- Use tone of voice to help calm somebody down if they become emotional. This helps people take in information and think more clearly.
- Help them to make decisions for themselves and suggest choices or options.
- Be willing to sit in silence and don't force the conversation if they don't feel like talking. Often, just knowing that somebody is there is a great help.
- Offer practical help such as grocery shopping or signposting to specialist organisations, but avoid making general statements like "Is there anything I can do to help?". Be specific and say "I am going to the supermarket later. What shall I pick up for you?"

Manage expectations

A perceived failure to deliver something that was promised can be extremely detrimental to a relationship. In more extreme cases it can lead to a permanent break in contact. Try to understand what an individual expects to happen and then be clear and honest about what can be achieved. Don't make promises about decisions that will be made by other people – for example, the outcome of an application for financial support.

2. KEEPING IN TOUCH

It is much easier to maintain a relationship than it is to re-establish broken links. In addition to speaking with members and their families on a regular basis, make the most of other opportunities. For example, rather than simply sending a birthday card and flowers, follow it up with a phone call or arrange to deliver the gift in person. Ongoing contact is a key tool in identifying emerging cases of need, and providing a chance for individuals to ask for help.

3. RECORD KEEPING

Keeping good records is essential. Useful information will include:

- Name, address, telephone number and email address for all individuals who will need to be contacted. This may include brethren, including those who have resigned or have been excluded, widowed partners and other dependants.

- Dates and notes of contact and visits.
- If appropriate, financial records including details of payments, receipts and other supporting paperwork.

All information must be collected and held in compliance with data protection rules. Section six of this guide provides more information about these regulations.

Sample almoner cards can be downloaded from mcf.org.uk/almoner-resources

4. UPDATING THE LODGE

It is important that the Almoner is proactive and provides regular reports to the Lodge. These should highlight the types of actions taken to assist individuals rather than setting out specific details of their situation.

Before sharing information about an individual, it is essential that their permission is obtained.

5. USING TECHNOLOGY

The role of Almoner is much easier if the holder is confident using a computer and other digital tools. Increasingly, communication is taking place online through email and messaging services like Whatsapp or Facebook Messenger, and it is likely records will be held in electronic format.

More and more people have turned to video conferencing technology like Zoom and FaceTime to communicate with friends, colleagues and loved ones. Almoners will find these methods of communication extremely useful.

Further information

UGLE Communications Toolkit: mcf.org.uk/communications-toolkit

ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/technology-internet

6. HANDING OVER

It is recommended that the Lodge uses its discretion to appoint a deputy Almoner. This will provide support to the Almoner and can facilitate a smooth handover to a successor.

It is important to hand over the following to a successor:

- Contact records: Providing names, addresses and other information is vital to ensuring continuity.
- Support materials gathered, including this guide and other reference materials that help when carrying out the role.

Ensure that everyone knows that duties have been handed over. This is particularly important for widowed partners and other dependants. Failure to let people know can lead to people losing contact with the Lodge and important information being sent to the wrong person.

3. SUPPORTING FREEMASONS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Regular contact with the Almoner can encourage someone to confide in them. Almoners can also be proactive in identifying any needs and concerns. Whilst telephone conversations and video calls can be good, if it is safe to do so, consider visiting someone in their own home. On occasions, circumstances may dictate that these visits may be conducted by another Lodge member. It is essential to consider current social distancing guidance at [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)

Face to face interaction is a chance for the Almoner to show he really cares about a person's situation, and it can offer a valuable insight into individual circumstances. If safe to do so, face to face visits to the following groups can be particularly beneficial:

- Sick brethren
- Widowed partners and single brethren
- Individuals and families who have recently experienced a significant life change, such as a redundancy, bereavement or relationship breakdown
- Lodge members missing meetings, social events or festive boards

THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR

When visiting a person at home pay attention to the surroundings and look for signs that help or support may be needed.

Possible signs of financial difficulty include:

- Property in state of poor repair
- Evidence of damp or infestations
- Overgrown garden
- Little or no heating inside property
- No working telephone or internet
- Car off the road or needing repair
- Little food in the cupboards or fridge

- Worn carpets, wallpaper or curtains
- Neglected or sick pets
- Unkempt appearance
- Unopened post

Possible signs of ill health, including anxiety and depression

- Weight loss or gain
- Changes in usual energy levels
- Mobility aids and medicines
- Difficulty remembering recent events, messages, names or directions
- Confusion or difficulty finding the right words
- Rapid or rambling speech
- Tearfulness, headaches and sudden changes in moods and emotions
- Evidence of hoarding

Possible signs of loneliness and social isolation

Loneliness and social isolation affect a significant number of people. Regular contact will help by bringing individuals into the masonic support network. Loneliness is often hidden and unrecognised so it is important to be alert for the signs. These can include:

- A significant change to a person's daily routine
- Neglected appearance or personal hygiene
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Sudden loss of appetite or weight
- Loss of a companion or friend
- Little or no recent human interaction or contact

The MCF has a social isolation toolkit. It offers Almoners and others some practical tools and resources to help Provinces tackle loneliness and social isolation in their local communities.

Visit mcf.org.uk/resources/social-isolation-toolkit

The Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner can give details of local initiatives.

Mental wellbeing

Like physical health, mental wellbeing is a crucial aspect of our everyday life. It is important to be aware that there are a number of diagnosable mental health conditions with different symptoms that can vary in severity, intensity and form.

The Almoner role can potentially identify if a Brother or family member is experiencing a mental health issue, and ensure they receive support by gently encouraging them to speak to their GP or an appropriate organisation.

For more information read the Almoner's Mental Health factsheet at mcf.org.uk/almoner-resources

Other things to look out for

- Security risks – doors and windows not fitted with locks or closed properly
- Safety risks – trip hazards and everyday items not within easy reach
- Fire hazards – too many plugs in one socket, items close to a fire or heater

If the Almoner notices anything which concerns him, it is important to not make assumptions based on what he sees. However, it should prompt him to sensitively explore the circumstances further.

For example, a cold house could mean that the person is struggling to afford their heating bills but it could also mean that the person is comfortable at that temperature.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

The following suggestions can be used to start a conversation:

- How have you been recently?
- How is your spouse/partner?
- How are your children/grandchildren?
- Have you seen family or friends recently?
- How do you keep in contact with friends and family?

- What are your neighbours like? Do you see or speak with them often?
- Have you been out recently? Where did you go?
- How is your job? How is your spouse's/partner's job?
- Do you have any special interest or hobbies? Do you like reading/gardening/baking/watching films/crafts etc.?
- Do you belong to any clubs or groups? Do you attend meetings or participate socially in other ways?
- How is your health?
- Has anything been troubling you recently? Is there anything that you would like to change?

To learn more about specific circumstances ask:

- Are you struggling to pay any bills?
- Are you on the waiting list for an operation/medical treatment?
- Are you managing with everyday chores such as cleaning, preparing meals and grocery shopping? Do you have help?
- Are you easily able to collect prescriptions?
- How are you looking after your health?
- Do you feel safe in your home?
- Do you have anyone who is helping you or that you can speak to?

If the Almoner identifies an issue or concern, the most important question to ask is 'How can I help?' Section four explains some of the support available.

QUICK TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL CONVERSATIONS

Visits

- Arrive on time.
- Introduce yourself and say how nice it is to see them.
- Wait to be invited in, but if they don't then ask.
- Ask before you sit down.
- Explain why you are visiting.
- Mute your mobile phone.
- Listen attentively.
- Ask open questions and be observant.
- Leave with a smile and suggest a date and time for your next conversation.

Phone/video call

- Make sure you have the right person.
- Introduce yourself and explain who you are.
- Explain why you are calling.
- Speak clearly and confidently.
- Listen attentively.
- Ask open questions.
- Repeat back key information to ensure it is correct.
- Promise to contact them again and suggest a date and time for your next conversation.

4. HOW TO HELP

If an issue or need is identified the Almoner should offer support. This section explains more about the many sources of support and assistance available.

METROPOLITAN/PROVINCIAL GRAND ALMONER

The Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner is a good first point of contact when a Lodge Almoner is unsure what to do next. They will be able to explain support available from the Province and may also have details for other local organisations and agencies who can assist.

In some Provinces, the Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner will be part of a larger team and together they will have many years of experience of supporting people through a wide range of issues and difficulties – do not be afraid to ask for their help. Please refer to Section one of this guide for more information on the role of the Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner.

HOW THE MASONIC CHARITABLE FOUNDATION – THE FREEMASONS' CHARITY – CAN HELP

The MCF builds better lives by encouraging opportunity, promoting independence and improving wellbeing for Freemasons, their married, life or widowed partners, children, stepchildren and grandchildren. Support can be provided for daily living costs; children, young people and education; and health, care and wellbeing.

In addition to the millions of pounds of support the MCF provides to Freemasons and their families, the MCF awards millions of pounds each year to local and national charities that help vulnerable or disadvantaged people, advance medical research and provide opportunities for young people.

Funded entirely through the generosity of Freemasons and their families, the MCF is one of the largest charities in the UK.

SUPPORT AVAILABLE FROM THE MCF

Practical assistance

The MCF's Advice and Support Team (AST) offers advice, guidance and support on a range of issues that can affect those within the masonic community. Operating across England and Wales, the team provides a free, independent and confidential service for those seeking support.

The advice and support available includes:

- Assisting with completing applications for individual support.
- Talking about financial difficulties.
- Recommending the best approach to meet care needs.
- Helping to plan and access effective medical and dental treatment.
- Supporting children with practical advice and guidance on education and wellbeing.
- Discussing the extensive range of financial, health, family and care support available from the MCF.
- Signposting to benefits and services available from the government and other organisations.

FINANCIAL

Essential daily living costs: Grants can be considered where there is a need for ongoing financial support. Support is aimed at increasing household income to improve everyday living standards to an acceptable level.

Help through an accident, bereavement, redundancy, or other personal crisis: Grants for everyday living costs and other essential expenses resulting from short-term or unexpected financial difficulty. Although the MCF will not repay debts, they may be able to offer ongoing support with expenses to avoid further debt building up or to help provide a basic standard of everyday living during the period when the debts are being repaid.

Funeral bills: Essential costs relating to the provision of a basic funeral where no other funds are available.

HEALTH

Medical treatment: Grants for medical treatment or surgery are available when there is a wait of 12 weeks or more for general NHS treatments or eight weeks or more for cardiac treatment. Cancer treatment or treatment for macular degeneration have no specific wait threshold and are considered on a case by case basis.

Consultation and assessment: Grants are available to cover the costs of consultations or assessments where individuals are facing a wait of longer than eight weeks. Follow-up consultations and second opinions are not funded.

Mobility equipment: To help applicants retain their independence, grants are available for a range of mobility aids including power chairs, stairlifts, and car hoists.

Home adaptations: Grants can be considered for home adaptations for people living with disabilities or mobility problems. Examples include widening doorways and installing ramps for accessibility.

Counselling: Up to six telephone or face-to-face sessions can be arranged with a qualified and experienced counsellor based within 15 miles of an applicant's home or place of work.

CHILDREN IN FULL-TIME EDUCATION

Essential costs for education or training: Specific grants for one-off items such as IT equipment, course materials, school uniforms and travel.

Scholarship travel grants and student accommodation: Financial support for those in further, higher or postgraduate education.

Supporting exceptional talent: Financial support to provide equipment or training for those with the potential to develop a career in music, sports or the performing arts.

CARE

Masonic care homes: Masonic care homes operated by the RMBI Care Co offer a range of nursing, residential and dementia care to meet the needs of older people at 18 locations across England and Wales. Visit rmbi.org.uk/our-homes

Breaks for carers: Grants can fund the cost of breaks for family carers who provide vital support for a loved one. Grants can support short-term residential care breaks, domiciliary care in an individual's own home or day centre care.

UK holidays and short breaks: Fully-financed and part-funded trips to locations within the UK.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR SUPPORT FROM THE MCF?

A masonic connection

Those seeking support must be a Freemason or have a strong family connection to a Freemason under UGLE. The Freemason does not necessarily need to be a subscribing member, but he must have joined before the need arose.

A financial, health, family or care need

Many needs follow a decrease in household income, or they may arise because of a life-changing event such as a medical diagnosis, changing care needs, family breakdown or the death of a family member. Any support awarded is in addition to available state benefits and applicants should be claiming all support available.

To explore out if someone may qualify for support visit mcf.org.uk/get-support/freemasons-and-families/

REQUESTING ASSISTANCE

To request assistance for a Brother or their family, contact the Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner. Alternatively you can call the MCF direct on freephone **0800 035 60 90** or email **help@mcf.org.uk**

If an application is appropriate, arrangements will be made for someone to make contact and complete the relevant application form and report.

An applicant or the person completing the form may invite the Almoner to be present when the application form is completed.

RMBI CARE CO

RMBI Care Co (Company no. 1293566, Charity no. 1163245), a subsidiary of the MCF, provides high quality care services for older Freemasons, their families and people in the wider community. All 18 RMBI Homes provide residential care and some are registered for nursing care.

All RMBI Homes can support people with dementia following an assessment of their needs, but where residents have more advanced dementia needs, the Home will have a Dementia Support House. Harry Priestley House in Doncaster, provides care for adults with learning disabilities.

RMBI also offer limited sheltered and independent living accommodation for people who prefer to live more independently, but with support from staff where required. Residents who come into one of the Homes will have a financial assessment to ascertain their individual circumstances. If a resident reaches the stage where they are no longer able to pay for their care, RMBI will continue to support their fees, as long as their care needs can still be met.

How to apply for a place at an RMBI Home

To apply for a permanent or temporary placement, or for more information about a specific Home, contact the preferred Home.

A list of all RMBI Homes is available at **rmbi.org.uk/our-homes**

To obtain a copy of 'A Freemason's Guide to RMBI Care Co' and for other admission enquiries, contact the Residents Placement Manager at:

RMBI Care Co
60 Great Queen Street
London
WC2B 5AZ
0207 596 2400
enquiries@rmbi.org.uk

RMBI services are available to people who are self-funding or funded by their local authority. All applicants are assessed on an individual basis and will be advised of their weekly fee before moving into the Home. The fees cover accommodation, meals and care and may change as needs change.

Home Managers welcome visitors from local Lodges.

RMBI operates 18 care homes in England and Wales:

Berkshire (Wokingham)	Lord Harris Court
Bournemouth (Westbourne)	Zetland Court
Bridgend (Porthcawl)	Albert Edward Prince Of Wales Court
Conwy (Llandudno)	Queen Elizabeth Court
Devon (Exeter)	Cadogan Court
Doncaster (Thorne)*	Harry Priestley House
East Sussex (Hove)	Barford Court
Essex (Braintree)	Prince Edward Duke of Kent Court
Hertfordshire (Watford)	Prince Michael Of Kent Court
Kent (Chislehurst)	Prince George Duke of Kent Court
Leicester (Oadby)	Devonshire Court
Liverpool (Great Crosby)	The Tithebarn
Manchester (Eccles)	Ecclesholme
Northumberland (Cramlington)	Scarborough Court
Suffolk (Bury St Edmunds)	Cornwallis Court
Surrey (Hindhead)	Shannon Court
Surrey (Croydon)	James Terry Court
York (Fulford)	Connaught Court

* Care for adults with learning disabilities

OTHER SOURCES OF SUPPORT

State benefits

An Almoner does not need to have a detailed understanding of state benefits but a basic knowledge can be beneficial when signposting members or dependants.

The government's website provides the most up-to-date information and guidance on state benefits. Visit **gov.uk**

Age UK (**ageuk.org.uk**) and Citizens Advice (**citizensadvice.org.uk**) provide a range of useful and 'user friendly' information on benefits for people of all ages. The MCF has also produced a helpful reference guide **mcf.org.uk/guide-to-benefits**

Further information and support

There are numerous charities and organisations which offer practical support, including grants, and advice. Visit **mcf.org.uk/alternative-support** for details of some of the best known ones.

Support for individuals may also be available from the Province or the Lodge, including via the Relief Chest Scheme. For more information about the Relief Chest visit **mcf.org.uk/support-our-work/relief-chest**

The MCF has also produced a series of factsheets to help the Almoner respond to the life events encountered. Topics covered include bereavement, debt, redundancy and mental health. Visit **mcf.org.uk/resources/almoner-resources**

5. WELLBEING OF YOURSELF AND OTHERS

WELLBEING AND LONWORKING

Following the simple wellbeing advice and lone visiting principles contained within this guide are important as is the need to be aware of the things to look out for. As members of society, we all need to keep an eye out for vulnerable adults, children and young people and to be vigilant to protect them from physical and emotional harm. As an Almoner, it is important to be aware of common types of abuse that you may come across. This includes physical, sexual, emotional, financial and domestic abuse and neglect.

ALLEGATIONS, CONCERNS AND DISCLOSURES

As a responsible citizen, if a person entrusts you with personal information or if you have a concern about a person's physical, sexual or emotional wellbeing it is **YOUR** responsibility to raise awareness. If a child or adult is at immediate risk then contact the police.

What to do if someone makes a disclosure

DO

- Remain calm, approachable and receptive.
- Listen carefully, without interrupting.
- Acknowledge you understand how difficult this may be.
- Make it clear that you are taking what is said seriously.
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing in telling you.
- Let them know that you'll do everything you can to help them.
- Make a written record of exactly what has been said keeping to the facts and noting dates and times.
- Report the concern to the local social services team or the police.

DO NOT

- Promise confidentiality
- Ask leading or probing questions.
- Investigate.
- Repeatedly question or ask the individual to repeat the disclosure.
- Discuss the disclosure with people who do not need to know.
- Delay in reporting the disclosure.

As a responsible charity, the MCF has developed and implemented safeguarding policies which follow good practice and are a useful reference point for Almoners. The policies and more information can be found at mcf.org.uk/policies/safeguarding-policies

LONE VISITING

The Almoner may visit the home of a Lodge member or his family. It is important to remember that if 'working alone' the Almoner could be vulnerable and there is no immediate support in the event of experiencing improper behaviour, violence or injury. Whilst occurrences are rare, it is important to think carefully about the risks which may be encountered and what can be done to reduce those dangers.

- Consider inviting another Lodge Almoner or someone else from the Lodge to join the visit. Make sure to let the person being visited know that someone else will be present.
- Think about the risks you may encounter. For example: ask if there will be anyone else at home during the visit; are there pets that need to be kept in a different room; can you park safely; and keep any expensive items out of view.
- There may be occasions where a neutral meeting place is needed such as a cafe, guildhall, library or public park.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel uneasy about anything – whether it is when you first contact the person or once you are in their home – take immediate action to improve your safety.
- Make sure you identify the exits and have an excuse to leave. For example, say you have left something important in your car.
- Tell someone where you are going, when you expect to return and what to do in an emergency. Avoid false alarms by checking in with them if your visit goes on longer than expected.
- Always carry a charged mobile phone so you can summon help quickly in an emergency.

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust (suzylamplugh.org) provides lots of personal safety tips and information.

REMEMBER: IF IN DOUBT, DON'T DO IT!

6. DATA PROTECTION

WHAT IS DATA PROTECTION AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Every organisation or group that holds and uses information about individuals must comply with data protection laws or risk costly fines. Ensuring personal information is accurate, up-to-date, kept securely and only shared with those who have permission helps to maintain trust in the office of Almoner and the important work linked to the role.

SOME SIMPLE STEPS TO FOLLOW

- Let people know what will happen with their personal information: they should know why you need their personal information, how long you will keep it and who it is going to be shared with. This information can be given verbally or in writing.
- Only collect the information needed. Don't collect extra information 'just in case'.
- Let people know they have the right to correct any information if it's wrong and inform them how to get in touch if they decide they don't want the information used anymore.
- Share the information held about an individual with them if they request a copy.
- Only keep information for as long as it is needed. Have a schedule for reviewing and deleting information – and follow it.
- Ensure the information is kept up-to-date. If possible, take a moment to check and update records with individuals every time there is contact.
- The information collected can only be used for the purpose(s) given when it was collected. For example, it is not possible to send a fundraising request to someone who has provided their details so they can be sent details of upcoming fellowship meetings.
- Make sure to have a strong password for files and portable devices. Use symbols, numbers, and upper and lower case letters to make the password stronger.

- If information is stored on laptops and other devices, consider installing a remote 'wiping' solution that will delete the hard drive in the event it is stolen.
- Shred paper files before throwing them away and make sure that files have been permanently wiped from laptops, computers and other devices before they are disposed of.
- Make sure the Almoner is the only one with access to the email account used for Almoner duties. Do not use a joint account that is shared with anyone else.
- Be careful when sending information outside of the UK. It is unlikely that the Almoner will need to do this and it is important to get the agreement of the person concerned first. Remember other countries do not have the same level of protection for personal data that the UK does.

FURTHER SUPPORT ON DATA PROTECTION

UGLE Guidance for Almoners is available from the Provincial Grand Secretary or visit **mcf.org.uk/almoner-faqs**

For general information on data protection visit **ico.org.uk**

7. FURTHER INFORMATION

United Grand Lodge of England have useful resources and materials:
ugle.org.uk

For more information about the Masonic Charitable Foundation:
mcf.org.uk



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Charitable Foundation