

ACRE Briefing

2nd April 2020

This briefing has been developed from the enquiries and requests received from everyone involved with community buildings during the current pandemic.

- a) **Insurance** Insurers have issued practical advice, such as making sure heating is reduced to frost protection unless the hall continues to be used for essential services, empty and turn off fridges, clean and leave open to air etc. Check insurance to see if your policy has cover which might apply. Some insurers have changed their unoccupancy clause to help village halls whilst they are closed. Copies of practical advice from Allied Westminster Insurance Services Limited, supporter of ACRE's Village Hall Service, are available on request.
- b) **Fixed Costs** 100% rate relief should be available (see Guidance about eligibility for relief). Water, sewerage, utilities, refuse collection fees, music copyright licenses and others would normally need to be paid. The cost of those that cannot be deferred should be covered by the grant mentioned below.

An online petition has been posted by [38 Degrees](#) (not ACRE) asking for PRS and PPL to waive fees in the current situation. If this is not successful, because fees are based on previous income (excluding grants), it may be that any savings will only become apparent in 2021. ACRE plans to check the situation directly with PPL and PRS shortly.

- c) **Record keeping** Maintaining payments and records during the whole period of social isolation is vitally important. Those trustees over 70 will be self-isolating and unable to attend meetings etc until mid-June at the earliest. Any online meetings need to be minuted. The Charity Commission have provided advice [here](#)
- d) **Keeping Hirers informed** The Grant and rate relief explained in our guidance should provide some flexibility to enable your hall to issue refunds or hold bookings in the diary according to circumstances, so that you retain the goodwill of the local community. The Government's announcement that halls must close means that

wedding hirers with Wedding Insurance cover may be able to make a claim against their own policy. Note that Government guidance for childcare settings encourages the owners of shared premises such as village and community halls to use the extended 100% rate relief to offer a rent reduction to nurseries and pre-schools which must stay open but with fewer children.

e) Re-opening While the date will be uncertain, and some hirers may be able to return before others (those serving mainly people over 70 may open later than those for young people) attention needs to be given to cleanliness and a health and safety check. ACRE has a range of Information Sheets available from your local [ACRE Network](#) member that can help you. Re-opening is an opportunity for a celebration, to arrange with the Parish Council an opportunity to thank key workers living locally and volunteers in the community for all they have done. It's an opportunity to make people aware how important your community facilities are, how the usual community activities and events were missed and appeal for new volunteers to help run the hall and organise events in future.

f) Lessons learned

The fact that key trustees could lose their lives or those of loved ones due to Covid19 is a warning to think about the Hall committee's situation and consider the following:

- How records and information about management arrangements should be more widely shared. For instance, through an online system such as Dropbox
- Producing a 'Trustee Induction Pack' or 'Know How Manual'. Model documents are available from your [ACRE Network](#) member.
- Whether you have a reserves policy and enough reserves?
- The Hall's budget? Is it prepared annually and reviewed regularly?
- If the committee have seriously considered risks to the organisation?
- Is there a resilience plan for the hall?

Advice can be found on the Charity Commission [website](#)

g) Don't forget that if VE day commemorations due to be held at the May Bank Holiday are able to go ahead they may exclude those over 70 who would remember the 2nd World War and its aftermath. VJ day on 15th August, which marks the real end of the 2nd World War, might be the time to reorganise that commemoration.

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