

Community Halls adapting to the Covid-19 crisis

A plan/risk assessment needs to be put in place

Things to consider:

- How will the hall be cleaned if the cleaner has to self-isolate?
- How will you make sure the hall is cleaned properly?
- Keys and sharing, in an old-style hall there may be an outside place to collect keys that only regular hirers know- this helps with social distancing.
- If you have a keypad then hirers need to wash their hands before and after entry and same on exit, cleaning needs to be carried out very regularly, in case some hirers are not as thorough as others.
- Financial implications of closure
- People you buy supplies services from: will there be a delay in payment if your treasurer or signatories are ill?
- Trustees covering each other's roles if anyone becomes unwell, i.e. Chair, treasurer, secretary, bookings, maintenance, social media.

Cancellation of bookings

Hall committees need to follow what it says in your existing hire agreement and conditions of hire with regards to hirer cancellations. You should also act in the best interests of the charity. If your policy does not fit the current situation, a policy should be agreed so that your bookings secretary knows what to say.

If your hall chooses to close (rather than the hirer cancelling their booking) it's different, but hopefully your hiring agreement should still cover this.

Most committees appear to be exercising flexibility in the interests of long-term community support for the hall, particularly for local voluntary groups.

Reserves policies

You hopefully have reserves and a reserves policy, you need to check these.

If not, a Crowdfunding appeal for donations (with Gift Aid) or PC grant could be sought to cover a cash flow issue.

The Government may make the financial help for business available for halls too.

Keeping your employees and self-employed workers in employment during the crisis

You may have enough reserves to keep cleaners, caretakers on for the moment. If this is long term, and we have to plan for this, they may have to have reduced hours. Or as mentioned above, other help may become available.

Guidance from ACRE if you have to close your hall

Protecting Your Village/Community Hall at this time:

- Halls may become unoccupied or operate on a significantly reduced level, and this increases the risk of losses.
- If your hall is running on a significantly reduced basis, and especially unoccupied due to the pandemic, letting your insurers know, and keeping them informed of any developments, is essential.
- It is essential that you let your insurer or policy administrator have a second and ideally third contact in the event of an insurable loss, allowing them to process the claim with an authorised and recognised person (GDPR!)
- This will help speed along any claims and avoid hold-ups. This is especially important right now when key contacts may suffer as a result of the illness.
- There are some considerations that should be kept in mind to protect their assets and people:
 - Risk assessments must be carried out on the changing risk/lack of supervision in place
 - Heating left 'ticking-over' but other critical services powered down if not required, unless to support protection or detection systems
 - All external areas must be clear of waste and combustible materials
 - Consider waste build-up and the controls needed if waste collection services are affected
 - All fire protection, detection, and security systems to remain active and monitored remotely where possible
 - Maintenance on all protection and/or detection systems (where in place) must be a priority to protect the property
 - All physical security and locking devices are working and in place
 - There are no leaking fluids or spills

Norris & Fisher Insurance Brokers Ltd. has issued the following statement

Coronavirus Advice for Village Halls: We have received a number of enquiries as to whether Village Halls would be insured should they be forced to cancel activities or if hirers cancel their bookings owing to COVID-19. The Business Interruption cover under the policy would not provide cover for this type of loss so there is no insurance for loss of earnings. If there were to be a pandemic it would be beyond the capability of insurers to pay for such losses.

Some of our halls have asked their hirers to ensure that, if one of their members is ill, they should not attend the Hall. Should a visitor have been in contact with anyone suffering from the virus they should self-isolate. However, if an outbreak of COVID-19 were to be traced to the Hall it would not be possible for you to be held liable. In addition, it may be best to ensure you have a good supply of soap, hand sanitisers and paper towels.

Further advice

- Please be aware if your hall features in the plans of the local emergency response team or a group set up to provide community support - you should plan for this.
- Please ask the organisers of regular events to think of the impact of closure on isolation, well-being etc. and to find alternative ways of providing support.
- Please circulated advice on hygiene and management of the building.
- Keep abreast of national guidance.
- Review the impact of closure on the community and the hall.
- Consider any needs to make the hall available.
- Prepare for re-opening.

Charity Commission Guidelines

The Charity Commission helpline say they will be posting guidance to the effect that trustees can, in the best interests of their charity take such actions beyond their governing documents as: postpone AGMs, hold meetings electronically (even if not allowed for in the governing document), co-opt new trustees.

Sources and Useful Links

- [Q&A on Coronaviruses – World Health Organization](#)
- [Managing Epidemics: Key facts about major deadly diseases – World Health Organization](#)
- [Pandemic Flu – Workplace Guidance – Health & Safety Executive](#)