Help for Halls Covid-19

Marr Area Partnership is here to help and support to village halls in Marr during Covid-19. We cannot provide legal advice, but our Halls Check List can help you to take care of your hall during the pandemic and beyond. You may already have carried out the actions suggested, or they may not be relevant to your hall; above all, it is best to **check with your insurance providers** regarding any actions you take.

Halls Check List

Property:

* Remove any valuable items;
* If you have a bar, secure or remove your stock of alcohol;
* If other community organisations have office space within your village hall, remind them that they are responsible for their own property.
* Make sure heating is reduced to frost protection unless the hall continues to be used for essential services,
* Turn off appliances; empty fridges, clean and leave open to air.
* Turn off the water and gas at the mains unless it is essential to leave them on;
* Take meter readings so that you can deal with any discrepancies in utility bills when the crisis is over;
* Check that the building is locked, and the windows are secure;
* If you have a letterbox seal it closed, and arrange for any post to be redirected for the duration of the crisis;
* Clear away rubbish, especially waste paper, timber, and anything that is combustible;
* If you have a gated car park, lock the gates unless other people have a right of access across your car park to adjoining property;
* Arrange for the hall to be checked at regular intervals.

Staff:

* You can retain staff via the furlough process – now extended until October. Full advice is available at SCVO <https://scvo.org.uk/support/coronavirus/employees/furlough>

Insurance:

* Tell your insurance company that the village hall is closed and let them know what you have done to secure the building;
* Ask if you need to do anything else to be sure that you remain covered by your insurance policy;
* Check if you have business interruption cover – however it is unlikely that you will be covered for the loss of income from events, bar taking and from groups who are regular users of the village hall because of the COVID-19 crisis. This type of cover commonly only applies if the building or the access to it has been physically damaged. Some insurers have changed their unoccupancy clause to help village halls whilst they are closed.
* Ask your insurers if they can offer you any extra support during this time - for example, some halls have had their insurance cover extended for 3 months at no extra cost.

Rates/Council Tax:

* Check the government website regularly to be sure that you are getting the maximum relief. Please see link in Funding section below.
* Apply through your local authority for any relief that you are not getting.

1. Fixed Costs:

* Calculate your fixed costs, such as council tax, insurance, utilities, broadband/wifi, music copyright licences, (PRS PPL \*) etc. If you can calculate costs per month, this will help with any funding application you might want to submit. Clearly, at the moment no-one knows how long halls will have to remain closed, but any funding available is likely to be for this period only.

*\*An online petition has been posted by 38 Degrees asking for PRS and PPL to waive fees in the current situation.*

Your landlord (If you rent your village hall):

* Tell your landlord that you are closed;
* Ask for a reduction in your rent both for the duration of the immediate crisis and for a period after restrictions start to be lifted to give you time to get back on your feet;
* If your landlord insures the village hall, remind them to contact the building insurer, and let your landlord know what you have done to secure the village hall;
* Be aware that that the Coronavirus Act 2020 forbids landlords who rent commercial premises on business tenancies from forfeiting leases on grounds of arrears of rent until 30th June, or later if this period is extended by the government.

Your trustees:

* Be sure that all your trustees understand the importance of following the new legislation, government guidelines, and insurer's and landlord's requirements to avoid the risk of personal liability.

If your village hall Is staying open because it provides an essential service:

* You and your service users must keep it very clean;
* Provide soap and sanitizer;
* Take steps to ensure that staff and visitors can remain at least at least 2 meters away from each other;
* Set up a queuing system with spaces marked every 2 metres for those needing to access the village hall;
* Tell your insurers that you are remaining open and the essential service that is operating from the village hall;
* Carry out risk assessments to ensure that you are compliant with government regulations and your insurer's requirements.

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.

1. Keeping Hirers informed:

* Remind hirers and user groups your hall is closed and keep them updated when you are able to re-open.
* 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.

Re-opening After Lockdown:

Keep updated with Government announcements about when and how halls are able to re-open.

After Covid-19:

* Trustees should 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 the Marr Area Partnership.
* 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?

Funding:

Each hall will be unique in its funding requirements, so please get in touch with the development officers at the Marr Area Partnership, <https://www.marrareapartnership.org.uk/> who will be happy to help you with your applications.

Applications at this time are not straightforward, as halls won’t yet know how much income will be lost due to the current crisis.

* The Small Business Support Grant <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/business/business-covid-19/coronavirus-business-support-grants/> has now been extended to include village halls if they are liable to pay rates. If your hall operates as a charity, you will be exempt from rates, but should still be eligible to apply for this funding.
* The third sector resilience fund may provide help for halls who can demonstrate that they “must be at risk of or unable to cover essential costs within 12 weeks from the date of application.” <https://scvo.org/support/coronavirus/funding/scottish-government/third-sector-resilience-fund>
* For a tailored funding search for your individual situation, contact; Donna Speed at AVA <https://www.avashire.org.uk/ava-staff.html> AVA, Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action have been provided with extra funds to support groups during the crisis.