

Eligibility for support from Government for village and similar rural community buildings

2nd April 2020

This guidance is based on information that is available now; the situation is changing rapidly whilst Government and support organisations work together to understand what is needed by each sector.

ACRE will update it as information becomes available to them.

A) What is a village hall charity eligible for?

Most village and community halls should be eligible for two forms of support: 100% business rate relief, (the Expanded Retail Discount or ERD), which is available to places of public assembly and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant (RHLG). The RHLG is £10,000 for premises with a rateable value up to £15,000 and £25,000 for premises with a rateable value over £15,000 and less than £51,000. You can find your rateable value at the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) website under the business section, by entering the hall's postcode or rating reference.

B) What do we have to do?

You should receive application forms from your local (rating) authority, which you will need to complete and return.

C) My local authority says we are not eligible, why could that be?

Local authorities are working to guidance issued by the Department for Business Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS). The initial guidance inadvertently excluded from support those charities already in receipt of full discretionary rate relief. Version 3, issued on 1st April, has clarified that charities already in receipt of full discretionary relief are eligible for RHLG.

Church halls, being religious charities, are currently exempt from the rating system and their eligibility is therefore currently unclear.

Parish and Town Councils running village halls and community centres, being precepting authorities, are shown in the BEIS guidance as ineligible.

Where a Parish or Town Council is sole trustee of a charitable hall it should be eligible because it is the charity which is the ratepayer and the rates payable out of charity income, not the Council as precepting authority. However, this position may need to be explained to rating authorities in case of query.

D) We have staff, albeit part-time, can we use the Government furlough scheme?

All UK employers with a PAYE scheme are eligible for the Government Scheme. This includes charities such as village halls as well as the public sector and Local Authorities. It's a temporary scheme open to all employers and will cover the cost of wages backdated to 1 March 2020. It's open for 3 months but will be extended if necessary. Employers can claim for 80% of furloughed employees' usual monthly wage costs, up to £2,500 a month, plus Employer National Insurance contributions and minimum automatic enrolment employer pension contributions on that wage.

Furloughed employees must have been on your PAYE payroll on 28 February 2020, and can be on any type of contract, including full-time employees; part-time employees; and employees on flexible or zero-hour contracts.

We note that the Government guidance says: "Where employers receive public funding for staff costs, and that funding is continuing, we expect employers to use that money to continue to pay staff in the usual fashion and not furlough them. This also applies to non-public sector employers who receive public funding for staff costs." So, if your employees are paid for from Parish Council or higher authority grants this would apply.

If your hall charity has self-employed workers, they may be eligible for the government's support for the self-employed, which will cover 80% of their lost income up to £2,500 per month. Self-employed workers should check the criteria carefully.

Further information can be found on the Government [website](#)

What other help and support can we access?

If the support available under the RHL Grant above is insufficient to cover the deficit likely to be incurred by your hall and you have insufficient reserves then you can ask your Parish or Town Council or District Council or Unitary Authority for revenue support to help with cash flow. Smaller Councils which have already set their precept for the forthcoming year and do not hold reserves may, however, have insufficient funds to help.

ACRE is making a proposal for emergency funding from Government to help any hall faced with potential closure as a result of Covid19.

Your local [ACRE Network](#) member can advise you on a range of issues relating to your hall and can provide a copy of ACRE's general briefing to support Halls during this time.