

## 21. Overnight Accommodation in Village Halls

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A growing number of village halls are used for overnight accommodation on an occasional basis and some management committees have requested guidance in order that such bookings should not infringe any regulations which apply to the premises.

## 1. Potential users

Overnight requests for accommodation in village halls are received usually for the following purposes:

- a. Weekend or week-long holidays for Guides and Scouts and similar youth organisations. The accommodation is basic and communal living arrangements provide experience for young people. In addition, wet weather facilities enable organisers to cope with difficulties posed by camping. Such requests are usually for summer or Easter vacation periods when the hall would otherwise be used infrequently, although Village Hall Management Committees need to be aware of problems which could arise from very advanced bookings.
- b. As a base for volunteers carrying out conservation tasks in rural areas usually on behalf of groups affiliated to the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV). Tasks are carried out throughout the year and accommodation is normally needed for one or two nights only at weekends. Conservation work may be carried out on local farms or nature reserves, for which the volunteers themselves receive no payment, and nearby accommodation at low cost is essential.
- c. Emergency use, for example in case of flood or snow storms.

## 2. Charitable status

As long as overnight accommodation is occasional and does not interfere with bookings by local people or organisations, for whose benefit the hall is primarily intended, it should not jeopardise the charitable status of a village hall or rate relief on the hall.

## 3. Health & Safety

Those managing village halls and similar community buildings have a 'duty of care' under common law towards individuals and organisations to avoid carelessly causing personal injury or damage to property. Management committees also have a statutory duty under the Health & Safety at Work Act, 1974, to take 'reasonably practicable' steps to ensure the health and safety of employees and others who use the hall.

Clearly, no one can guarantee total protection against accidents. Risks need to be assessed and the measures required to reduce or avoid them have to be balanced against the cost and practicality of the relevant safety measures. For more information on health & safety legislation and risk assessment see **Village Halls Information Sheet 15, Health & Safety Legislation and Village Halls**. To view a website specifically on health and safety risk management visit [www.hse.gov.uk/risk/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/index.htm)

### 3.1 Environmental Health

Food Safety and Food Hygiene Regulations apply to any premises where food or drink is stored and supplied, whether or not they are registered as food premises. The management committee is responsible for meeting legislative requirements to ensure the hall, and in particular the kitchen, adequately provides for the level of catering to be undertaken by the hirers, and that it is cleaned and well maintained. The local officer at the Environmental Health Department of the District Council or Unitary Authority should be consulted for advice on sanitary and food hygiene arrangements. Any special arrangements for the overnight hire can then be made taking into account the individual circumstances of the hire. For more detailed information see **Village Halls Information Sheet 20, Health & Hygiene in Village Halls**.

### 3.2 Fire Safety

All village halls are required by legislation<sup>1</sup> to provide premises which are free from fire hazards, provide adequate fire precautions (fire fighting equipment, detection equipment, emergency lighting, exits) and have them properly maintained. Responsibility lies with the village hall management committee to ensure required fire precautions are maintained and good housekeeping practices are undertaken. Advice can be sought from local fire authorities about fire safety measures needed for individual halls. Village hall management committees are advised to contact the local fire authority to discuss if additional arrangements will be needed for the provision of overnight accommodation.

Management committees must ensure that they draw to the attention of the hirers the fire safety regulations at the time of booking. Particular care must be taken to instruct them of the following:

- the action to be taken in the event of a fire, including calling the Fire Brigade and evacuating the hall
- location and use of fire equipment
- escape routes and the need to keep them clear
- method of operation of escape door fastening
- appreciation of the importance of any fire door and of closing all fire doors at the time of fire
- location of the first aid box.

The following additional points should be made to hirers:

- There should be adequate space to walk safely between beds.
- Gangways to all exits equal in width to that of the exit doors, should be kept completely clear of any beds, clothes, furniture and equipment.
- There should be a policy on smoking which is made clear.
- A safety check should be made last thing at night. It would be helpful to provide a safety check list, e.g. cooker off etc.
- There should be adequate ventilation at night.

<sup>1</sup> The Licensing Act 2003, The Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997/1999 & the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2004.

## 4. Insurance

It is unlikely that occasional overnight use of village halls would invalidate insurance policies. However we have been advised that committees should inform their insurers of any change of use since this could affect their policies.

## 5. Hire charges and conditions

Whenever a village hall management committee hires out any part of its premises, it is strongly recommended that a written agreement be made so that both the management committee and the hirer know their rights and responsibilities. This hiring agreement ensures that both parties fully understand their responsibilities in relation to the hiring, establishing a clear contract between two parties which could be used as evidence should legal action become necessary. A **Model Hiring Agreement** is available from ACRE which may be adapted to suit overnight lettings.

Charges made for hire are clearly a matter for individual management committees. It is usual to charge per 24-hour period and often there are reductions for children and groups from within the area. Committees may well wish to increase the deposit, but this is a decision which should be made in the light of local circumstances.

## 6. Children

### 6.1 Child protection

The Protection of Children Act 1999 introduced the Protection of Children Act (PoCA) List in which the Secretary of State has a duty to record the names of individuals who are considered unsuitable to work with children. Childcare organisations are legally required to check individuals against this list and list 99, through the Criminal Records Bureau Lists, maintained by the Department of Health and Department for Education and Skills (DfES) before offering them a child care post. Other organisations caring for or supervising children will also be able to make such checks and are strongly advised to do so.

Village hall committees whose premises are used by child care organisations but are not providing such care themselves, do not need to draw up child protection policies or carry out such checks as the onus is on the child care organisation to do so.

However, it is advisable for village hall committees to check that any organisations caring for and supervising children have the necessary policies and checks in place. These organisations need to be made aware that other persons may be on the premises for example a caretaker, and that children should never be left alone or in that person's care unless the appropriate checks have been carried out. If your hall has employees, perhaps a caretaker or cleaner, who are likely to be in unsupervised contact with the groups hiring the hall, then it would be advisable to undertake a recruitment check under the Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure Service. For further information on child protection policies see **Village Halls Information Sheet 5, Village Halls, Children and Young People**.

### 6.2 Registration with Ofsted

Under the Children Act of 1989, certain requirements were created for the registration of day care provision for the under 8's. The obligation to register lies with the organisers of the activity not the management committee of the hall who are responsible for the premises, but not the activity.

## 7. Other Considerations

Here are some other considerations that groups using the hall as overnight accommodation should be made aware of:

- general facilities available to them including the location of car parking
- main controls and how to use them e.g. heating controls, fuse box etc
- cleaning arrangements and care of hall. Instructions concerning the care of the hall should be clear and equipment should be readily available. Management committees should be bear in mind that groups such as the conservation volunteers will need somewhere to put muddy, wet outer clothing
- provision made for the disposal of rubbish. Clear instructions should be given and any recycling arrangements should be explained to the hirer.

Village hall management committees should also:

- satisfy themselves that the hirers will pay consideration to neighbours and avoid activities which could cause undue noise or late night disturbance
- check the covenants contained in the lease or freehold title to the village hall to make sure that there is no provision prohibiting overnight accommodation
- check that they do not contravene any planning requirements e.g. there may be planning provision that only permits the use of a village hall for overnight accommodation up to a certain number of times each year without requiring planning permission.

Some groups may have their own standards which need to be met which you may like to discuss with the hirer.