

Alstonefield Village Hall Committee – Supplementary Risk Assessment for ‘warm hub’ opening

This document is supplementary to the village hall's general risk assessment. Its purpose is to assist in identifying and mitigating any risks to which we or the public may be exposed as a result of opening the premises more freely during the winter months, specifically as a warm space for locals in the Parish to use.

The potential need for such provision has arisen as a result of significantly increased utility costs in Q4 of 2022, which may lead to people feeling unable to keep their heating on during the daytime, for fear of the high bills that may follow (as much as double the levels of 12 months ago). Government support for peoples' electricity bills is limited and there is as yet (7 December 2022) no statement of the timing of the support available for people using alternative fuel for heating, such as oil, log burners, LPG, coal, etc. These are far and away the most common forms of heating in the area. An amount of £200 is understood to be payable by the Government in the new year but this has not yet been confirmed and is any event fairly low compared to the increase in costs that are being experienced.



The need for what have been termed ‘warm hubs’ has led to many spaces being identified by Councils nationwide (libraries, church halls, cafes, sports clubs, etc). ACRE* has recognised that village halls are ideally placed in rural communities that have none of the above facilities. It has published a briefing note for members, with advance notice of its Village Halls Week in January 2023, on the theme of “Warm, welcoming and inclusive spaces”, something they describe as “*especially important as the country faces a cost-of-living crisis*” (link [here](#)). The Parish Council has been informed of our intention to open as a warm hub.

Our insurers, too have recognised that village halls may establish warm hubs, and reminded committees that:

- If food (other than tea and coffee) is prepared, that would be subject to the usual food safety management requirements
- a risk assessment should be undertaken.

The government has made financial support available for village halls and community buildings through a recovery fund delivered through County Councils, described as “...*one-off grants to assist in organisational recovery following the pandemic and with the challenges of the rising cost of living*”. We were successful in receiving a grant of £2,500 towards the increased costs of utility bills (heating oil and electricity) from Staffordshire County Council’s Community Foundation. The grant is expected to be paid at the end of December, which will help with the refill of heating oil needed at around that time and, with the expected increased usage, again towards the end of March.

Of course, there is no way of knowing what the winter weather might bring or how many people will need (or want) to use the facility offered. As a committee, we may need to offer incentives such as coffee mornings as an encouragement, and perhaps to overcome peoples' possible reluctance to admit they might need help in this way. Making the provision a social activity increases the likelihood of inclusivity and acceptance by as many people as possible, whether or not they have a financial need for the support.

M Snodin, Chair

7 December 2022

* Action with Communities in Rural England

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Area or People at Risk	Risk identified	Actions to mitigate risk	Notes
Village Hall charity	Financial losses from opening and heating the premises all the time (9-5) rather than only when used by hirers.	Grant from Staffs CC Community Foundation will more than cover cost of heating oil and most, if not all, of additional lighting and other expenses arising.	Main increased cost would be heating, as no food preparation involving the cooker is anticipated.
Village Hall charity	Uncontrolled access by the public could result in theft or damage to equipment, stock or the building.	<p>Doors to any areas where stock or equipment is stored will be kept locked, i.e. doors to the first floor, storage room and cupboard doors in the main hall containing items of value.</p> <p>That aside, the risk is considered minimal, given the people likely to attend. In addition, committee members and known helpers who live close by will be attending before, during, and after its opening periods.</p>	<p>Most people using the premises will be from the village and from existing user groups who we know already will respect the building and equipment.</p> <p>Opening hours will be limited to those periods when regular hirers or other bookings are not using the premises.</p>
Village Hall charity	Increase in broadband use.	None – the broadband provider’s package provides unlimited use.	.
Vulnerable persons	Safeguarding – particularly children and the elderly (areas of risk might include abuse or bullying)	<p>Handbook safeguarding procedure (9c) is in place – Booking Sec is lead person, responsible for identifying and reporting any concerns that arise.</p> <p>No contractors will be permitted to work during ‘warm hub’ hours unless expressly agreed.</p>	<p>The people likely to use the premises will be from the village and from existing user groups, who we know already and who are likely to attend in the company of friends.</p> <p>A safeguarding poster is already on display on the main noticeboard area in the kitchen, with contact details for the Booking Sec.</p>

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		Given the nature of the likely users, the risk is considered low and a ‘watching brief’ is all that is needed.	Disabled access is good from the main (north) entrance, which is close to a disabled bay. No alcohol will be served during ‘warm hub’ hours.
Accessibility	Someone’s ability to use the facility could be affected by their location, their health or a disability.	Volunteers should be identified in advance, so that anyone wishing to use the facility, but unable to, can request assistance such as a lift.	Promotional material and activity should make reference to a pick-up/return service being available.
Low-income groups	People may feel unable to use the facility because of the cost of refreshments.	Provision of basic refreshments such as tea, coffee and biscuits on a self-serve basis can be offered without charge (or on a donations-only basis) and advertised on this basis.	If there are occasions when we, or volunteers, wish to offer hot snacks or meals, we may choose to make a reasonable charge for this but we should try and ensure any charge doesn’t deter people.
Public in general	Accident or injury	On opening the premises, the responsible committee member will ensure both main fire exit doors are unlocked, and also check at the end of each day that users have not left chairs or tables such they might create a trip hazard. Apart from tea and coffee making, the kitchen equipment (cooker, microwave) will be clearly marked as ‘not for use’ and switched-off at the mains, to avoid any potential for an increase in fire risk. That aside, no other actions are felt necessary as the general risk is low.	There are prominent notices in place to guide people to first aid equipment or emergency procedures, for example in the event of fire (location of extinguishers, fire alarm, emergency phone numbers, etc.). Sharp knives that could potentially cause harm are already kept in the store room, which is kept locked (with very limited key availability). If any food preparation is done, this will be carried out by or on behalf of the committee, by competent persons (i.e. people familiar with the equipment and competent in food safety).

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Public in general	Continuing concerns about COVID-19 might be a disincentive to attend.	Whatever actions we take may not be sufficient to reassure people who are particularly anxious, but some of the practical measures we had in place during the pandemic can be put in place, e.g. hand sanitiser or arrival and making masks available.	<p>Measures being taken can be included in promotional activity and materials.</p> <p>One action that would not be practical to take is to open windows, because this could defeat the point of a warm space.</p>
All	Risks not identified at this stage but emerging with use.	Any emerging risks reported by users or identified by committee members to be added to this risk assessment document with mitigating actions put in place.	<p>A contact number for the Booking Sec (for the public to report issues) is on display on the main noticeboard.</p> <p>Committee members have all contact numbers for each other, to discuss any concerns.</p>