

COMMUNITY HALLS - *Making Best Use Of Your Community Hall*

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This leaflet is designed to offer basic guidance on running your community hall. Every community hall is different so the following suggestions are guidelines only. They are ideas and systems you may find useful to adapt to your situation.

BOOKINGS

We've all heard the horror stories about double bookings, when the Kung Fu Club turned up on the same day as the Cat Fanciers Club, or the Nudist Club clashed with the Senior Citizens Indoor Bowls Club.

The simple lesson is that bookings need to be dealt with in an organised manner. All bookings should be channelled through one person, such as a Bookings Secretary or some other nominated person. This reduces the risk of double-bookings and other mix-ups and mistakes.

Make a note of all bookings, both provisional and confirmed in a bookings diary. Write the provisional bookings in pencil and the confirmed bookings in pen.

When taking provisional bookings give a finite period of time, e.g. a week, by which the booking must be confirmed. If they need longer, give them a definite date to come back to you to bring you up-to-date.

Give them a copy of the hiring agreement and draw attention to issues such as the need for a special liquor licence if they are planning to sell alcohol. The Hiring Agreement needs to be filled out before the provisional booking becomes a confirmed booking.

Once the booking is confirmed, change the entry in your bookings diary from pencil to pen.

***Suggestion:** It can also be useful to keep a planner calendar in the hall so potential hirers can check it to find out when the hall is available.*

Work out a simple system of hire charge collection with your Treasurer.

You also need a system for the collection and return of keys. For security reasons, don't have too many sets of keys in circulation.

Afterwards, perhaps depending on the type of event, make sure you check the hall for damage. If there is damage you need to inform the hirer immediately.

HIRING AGREEMENT

A Hiring Agreement provides a way of setting out the responsibilities of both the hirer and the hall committee. This section is intended only to help you review your current hiring agreement and draw attention to possible areas that need to be considered. It is not intended as legal advice.

KEY POINTS

The Parties

The agreement should include the dates and times the hall is required, for the function and for setting up and cleaning up. If the agreement is for regular use of the hall, such as for a monthly club, these should be spelt out as well.

A Hiring Agreement is between the hall committee and the person hiring the premises, and as such it should give the name of the committee's authorised representative and the name of the hirer, along with contact details for both parties.

It needs to be signed by an authorised representative of the committee and the other party.

Fee

The agreement should state what the hiring fee is, what deposit is required, and what the balance is as well as when it is due by. If there is any special deposit to cover damage or loss it should state when that will be refunded, where there is no harm to the hall or its contents.

Premises

Make sure the agreement states which part of the hall is being hired. For example if you have a main hall and a lounge, and they are only hiring the lounge, make sure the agreement says that. This avoids confusion.

Purpose of Hiring

Is the hall being hired for a public or private function? Is it being used for commercial purposes?

Alcohol

Will alcohol be served? It is important to ask this and make sure that if the hirers are planning to sell alcohol - by cash or ticket, or make it available as part of an overall price- that they know they have obligations under the Sale of Liquor Act.

Music

You may want to ask if the hirers plan to play music and until what time. You may need to make them aware of their obligations under noise control legislation.

Conditions of Hire

You may have standard conditions of hire which you append to the Hire Agreement. The agreement should state that by signing it the hirers agree to abide by those conditions and any special conditions you impose.

Standard Conditions may include areas such as:

- **Supervision.** Stipulating that the hirer will be responsible for the care supervision of the premises, and the behaviour of people using the premises.
- **Use of Premises.** That the hirer won't use the premises for any purpose other than that described in the hiring agreement or allow the premises to be used for any unlawful activity.
- **Licenses and Royalties.** Stating that the hirer shall be responsible for obtaining any licences necessary for activities such as the sale of liquor. It should also be made clear to any hirer which is likely to be liable for music or entertainment royalties that they are their responsibility.
- **Gaming, Betting and Lotteries.** The hirer must do nothing that breaches the law in these areas.
- **Public Safety.** That the hirer shall comply with conditions and regulations, such as Fire Safety and local authority regulations and not take any actions which will block of safety exits etc. For halls required to have a Fire Evacuation Scheme this will include making sure they agree to appoint a fire warden. (See the leaflet on legislation affecting halls for further information).
- **Electrical Appliance Safety.** The hirer must ensure that any electrical appliances brought onto the premises are in a safe and good working order and will be used in a safe manner.
- **Indemnity.-** (NB it may be well worth talking to your hall's insurer on this issue.) Generally you should stipulate that the hirer will pay for any damage to the building or its contents and for any loss of revenue if it can't be hired out while repairs are made. You can also require the hirer to carry some form of public liability insurance for any claims made against them while using the hall. Again, talk to your own insurer about this.
- **Accidents and Dangerous Occurences.** The hirer must report all injury accidents to a member of the Management Committee as soon as possible.

- **Animals.** You may want to spell out any policy your hall committee has on animals. You may want to require written permission for any special event involving animals.
- **Cancellation.** You may wish to state that if the hirer cancels the booking before the event is held the issue of refunds will be at the discretion of the committee.
- **Unfit for Hire.** Consider including a clause to the effect that if for some reason the hall becomes unfit for the use for which it has been hired the committee shall not be liable to the hirer for any resulting loss or damage.
- **Refusal of Booking.** A clause allowing the committee the right to refuse a booking without notice or to cancel an agreement with 7 days notice in writing. The hirer shall only be entitled to reimbursement of their deposit but no reimbursement of any resulting loss. You should only use this "out" in extreme circumstances otherwise potential hirers will avoid using your hall.
- **End of Hire.** Require the hirer to be responsible for leaving the premises and surrounding area in a clean and tidy condition, with contents put back in their usual positions. The premises should be properly locked and secured unless some other arrangement has been made. If the hirer fails to meet these requirements the committee should reserve the right to make an additional charge.
- **Noise.** That the hirer shall ensure that the minimum of noise is made on arrival and departure.

NB - Get the hirer to sign the conditions of hire as well as the Hire Agreement.

RULES OF USE

The Rules of Use will by necessity overlap with the conditions of hire laid down in the Hiring Agreement. Many of these rules will already be determined by the Trust Deed or other legal document your committee is governed by. Any rules should conform to what is in your trust deed, particularly where it relates to matters such as alcohol consumption etc.

The first rule when making rules is: Make as few rules as possible and make them as simple as possible.

They should cover issues such as:

Hall Hire

The rules should state who booking enquiries should be directed to. They should also state that the committee reserves the right to refuse any application.

Conditions of Hire

As set out in the Hiring Agreement. You can just refer to the document rather than reproducing the conditions.

Alcohol

You may wish to stipulate that no-one can bring alcohol onto the premises without permission.

Hours of Operation

You might want to lay down what times functions are allowed to run until.

Stage Performances/Public Entertainment

It may be worth considering

Betting, Gaming and Lotteries

Your trust deed may prohibit this or you may wish to remind hirers not to contravene gaming laws

Safety Regulations

Your rules may need to cover any issues of concern in this area.

Heating/Lighting

It may be in your interest to lay down rules or guidelines on the use of heating and lighting.

Car Parking**Nuisances**

For example, litter being left on or around the premises, or the issue of animals on the premises.

Once your rules have been finalised make sure they are posted where they are easily accessible.

SECURITY

Sadly, community halls can be a tempting target for vandalism and burglary. They are unoccupied for long periods, particularly overnight, and may not have residential neighbours who can keep an eye on things.

It is important to do as much as you can to make the job of burglars and vandals as difficult as possible and there are a number of key areas which you should consider to improve the security of your hall.

Outside Lighting. Make sure your hall has a good outside lighting system. This can be useful both for security reasons and for the safety of users as they approach and leave the hall. Sensor security lights which comes on when it detects movement is a good deterrent.

Locks. Good locks on both doors and windows are one of the best possible deterrents. They make it that much harder for a burglar to gain entry and force them to use noisier more hazardous methods such as breaking a window. They then have to climb through broken glass to get in.

Deadlocks on the doors mean that even if the burglar does get in through a window they don't have a quick means of escape and they have trouble getting larger items out of the building.

NB. All the deadlocks and window locks in the world won't help you if people don't use them. Make sure users are shown how to lock-up your hall properly when they leave. Even give them a checklist.

Also keep the number of sets of keys to a minimum and keep a good track of them by numbering them and using a key register which records who has keys.. Don't "hide" a spare key outside.

Security Screens. These can be put over windows. Some halls which are used by sporting groups fit them on the inside so they protect the window from breakage. A would-be burglar will soon see them through the window and think twice about trying to get in.

Security Markings and Security Straps. Make sure any valuable equipment kept in the hall has permanent security markings. This can be a deterrent and also makes it easier for stolen property to be identified and returned in the event there is a break-in. Putting security straps over valuable items such as VCRs makes them harder to remove and will discourage the burglar from trying. Keep valuable items out of sight of anyone looking through a window.

Alarms. Alarm systems also provide a good deterrent. It is important to seek good professional advice on the type of security system that would be suitable for your hall. Make sure you select a reputable, licensed company. There is a range of alarm options available from those using switches on windows and doors to others which use infra-red and motion detectors or a combination of those devices. A professional will be able to advise you on the best option for your hall.

Other Tips. Keep the hall looking tidy and as if it is used regularly. Remove or trim any trees or shrubs which shield windows or doors. They only give would-be burglars something to hide behind.

For further information or advice contact the Police or a reputable security firm.

COPING WITH CHANGING USAGE

Community Halls can't take it for granted that their current users will keep hiring the facilities. A loss of hirers will result in a loss of income and less money to spend on maintenance and improvements. If that happens you could lose even more users reinforcing a downward spiral.

Groups may stop using your facilities for a range of different reasons. They may outgrow your hall or they may lose members and simply stop their meetings - there's

little you can do about that. However others may leave because of poor heating and maintenance, dissatisfaction over charges or booking policies, or you may find yourself facing competition from other facilities.

Rather than reacting to the loss of bookings it is important to be working ahead, looking for new potential users - basically you need to indulge in a bit of a marketing exercise.

- Look at your facilities. What sort of uses are they best suited to? Are there other uses they could be put to? What sort of simple/inexpensive changes could be made to make the facilities suitable to a wider range of groups? Is there a case for capital spending to give the facilities a wider appeal?
- Listen to your local community. What do they want from their community hall? Are there age groups/interest groups that aren't being catered for? What facilities would they like to see provided? Can you provide that? What activities would they like to see provided? Is it feasible for you to provide that or find someone who can?
- Do a stocktake of local clubs, groups and societies which aren't already using your facilities. Which ones could be using your facilities and why aren't they? Is it an issue of cost, availability or some aspect of the facilities?
- Offer incentives for new groups. Offer to show them the facilities or even provide a special reduced rate for the first meeting(s) of a new group. Offer to help/encourage groups run fundraising events. Such activities can even spawn new groups such as a regular quiz or a local drama society.

Don't assume that the whole community knows the hall is available for hire. It is quite possible some have the impression that it is "a closed shop" and that you have to know the right people to use it. A simple brochure outlining the facilities that are available, the type of uses it is suitable for and who to contact could be distributed around the community. You could include a directory of the groups which already use the facilities. After all it is in your interests that they attract more members.

Entertainment, Events and Exhibitions

Making your hall available for entertainment, events and exhibitions could open up other avenues of use for your facilities. The entertainment could be in the form of plays, events could include a mini arts or food festival, and events could include the likes of art display.

Which of these options is practical will depend on what your hall has to offer. For example a play is going to require a stage of some sort, suitable changing rooms and lighting facilities. An art display will require the right sort of lighting and suitable display space. Just because you don't have everything you need at hand doesn't mean they can't be brought in.

Work out what sorts of entertainment, events or exhibitions your hall lends itself to and consider offering it to groups that might find it suitable. Find out what they need and where your facilities might be found wanting. There may not be that much of a gap and you could soon be increasing the range of uses for your facilities.