

Village Hall Manager's Report to the AGM on Wednesday 9th September 2020

Update on Reopening the Hall during the Covid-19 Pandemic

I'm sure everyone is aware that the Post Office had special dispensation to open and did so on 16th June. We monitored that very closely, as this was our first experience of any form of reopening, post lockdown and only the foyer was opened, with strict social distancing and only one customer allowed into the foyer at a time. This has worked extremely well ever since. The hall then opened properly on 24th July 2020, which was the first day that halls were allowed officially to do so.

Prior to that there was a sub-committee who met – socially distanced – to plan the reopening. It was decided that we would contact our regular hirers, beginning with the smallest, more manageable, groups and, throughout, we have followed the guidance from ACRE – Action for Communities in Rural England who – amongst other support – disseminate the government guidelines, as they relate to village halls. The updates are emailed weekly, via the group *Devon Communities Together*. We are also in regular communication with the insurance company to ensure that we follow their guidance. The committee and I work together to follow the updates on Covid-19 guidance and carefully monitor the effect it will have on the reopening progress.

Our very first bookings were from one of our regular hirers, Compassworks, who carry out orienteering training, as well as 2-day First Aid courses, have been able to use the hall – with appropriately distanced clients and catch up on their own backlog of bookings, which has been a help to the hall's coffers!

As the unlocking increased, this was followed up by the Commoners and Parish Council, who were also able to have appropriately distanced meetings and, eventually, yoga and Pilates who are both required to follow the Covid secure rules laid down by their own governing bodies. Tor Support Services have also held a meeting. This week, Art & Craft Group have returned, puppy classes are about to resume and a small band is practising on Saturday. The bookings are beginning to return to normal but, obviously, have to be spread further apart to enable appropriate sanitising.

Throughout all this, the committee has had to produce its own risk assessment which I am required, by law, to give each hirer and I request one from them. The hirer and I also sign a more specific sheet of guidance for them and their group (where appropriate) while using the hall.

Before, and throughout reopening, Eva Briggs (the cleaner) and I have ensured that the hall has been deep cleaned and sanitised – particularly in view of the restoration work that has gone on as well as the effects of Covid-19. Every opportunity is taken to improve its effectiveness of sanitising, therefore each hirer's needs are treated individually and negotiated with them when they book. The key safe, keys, door handles, etc. are always sanitised before and after a booking, as appropriate. I always insist that the required number of chairs and tables are made available, in the required room, to be arranged by the hirers but left in situ at the end, to be sanitised and replaced. Where appropriate, a set of tables and chairs are put aside to be reused by the same hirer, if no one else is using that space in the meantime. For example, until further notice, all the solid tables, plus 10 chairs are kept in the old bar area for the sole use of Art & Craft Group.

At present, the kitchen remains out of use and hirers are requested to bring their own refreshments and take away all their own refuse and recycling. Also, ladies' and gents' toilets are out of use – anyone hiring the main hall may use the accessible toilet in the foyer and those in the meeting room, use the accessible toilet near the rear entrance. During use, the door is locked between the two rooms, as this still allows exit through fire doors.

From the 4pm press conference, it would appear that we should be able to continue meetings such as this as I believe us to be a "Covid secure venue" but there's no confirmation yet so we must wait to see. We have been looking into the possibility of having one pop-up Thursday Café with an invited, restricted number of attendees to 'test the water' and find out how feasible it would be but there is no fixed plan – it will very much depend on future Covid-19 restrictions.

I hope this has helped everyone to understand how the Village Hall is managing during these strange times

Edwina Hill, Village Hall Manager – 9th September 2020