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Covid-19 (Coronavirus) information

In line with government advice on the management of the Coronavirus outbreak, it has become necessary to make changes to the way the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland delivers its services. The changes are aimed at protecting the Commission's service users and staff, while supporting charities in getting through what is a difficult and anxious time.

The Commission's office is now closed. We ask that if you have a query to please email it to us via admin@charitycommissionni.org.uk or complete the [Contact us](#) form and we will endeavour to respond to you as soon as possible. We will not be able to respond to phone calls at this time. We appreciate your understanding.

The Commission understands the charity sector will be facing a number of challenges during the pandemic, including looking after its staff, volunteers and trustees as well as playing a vital role in looking after beneficiaries, many of whom will be amongst the most vulnerable during this public health emergency.

We want to assure charities that our approach to regulation during this period will be as flexible and supportive as possible. Charities' primary interest, and ours, must be looking after the public and the communities that we serve.

You can find guidance on running your charity during the pandemic, and the main changes being implemented by the Commission, below.

Annual reporting

In the current circumstances please note that, until otherwise advised, no charity will be penalised for missing its annual reporting deadline, which includes that no charity will be marked as in default on the register of charities if they fail to meet this deadline. We would ask that if charities find themselves in this position that they contact us via email to admin@charitycommissionni.org.uk where possible, to keep us apprised of their situation.

Charity registration

Registration will continue as normal, however, there may be delays in responding to your correspondence, or making a final decision on your application.

If you are concerned that you will not meet your submission deadline you should contact the Commission as soon as possible via registration@charitycommissionni.org.uk to seek an extension. Remember to include the name of the charity and the reason for the extension request and importantly print a copy of your application if you have already started to complete it.

Where applicants require more time to submit further information to support an application which has already been submitted the Commission will also treat these requests pragmatically.

How do I get support to pay my charity staff?

The [government has announced that organisations, including charities, will get support to help them pay wages](#). (see link). Employers will be able to contact HMRC for a grant to cover most of the wages of their workforce who remain on

payroll but are temporarily not working during the coronavirus outbreak. Any employer in the country- small or large, charitable or non-profit will be eligible for the scheme.

Advice regarding charity meetings

This advice covers both general meetings and meetings of charity trustees. Some charities will have meetings planned, or required through the conditions of their governing document, over the coming weeks that will either have to be postponed or to be held virtually rather than in person. Where meetings are postponed, it is recommended that a note is kept documenting the reason why the meeting has been postponed, but the Commission will be pragmatic and reasonable and will not take any regulatory action where meetings are postponed as a result of these circumstances. Where a meeting is held virtually to safeguard the health of trustees, this should be recorded in the minutes and the Commission will accept this as a valid meeting, as long as it is quorate.

- **Can I cancel or postpone my charity's AGM or other key meetings?**

Charity trustees who cannot hold an AGM in compliance with their Articles of Association must ensure that the decision is recorded by the charity. Any record of such decisions should record that the decision was taken in response to the current health advice, and that plans to hold the AGM will be implemented as soon as reasonably possible after government advice on holding meetings changes.

- **Can I use video, teleconferencing and the internet in place of face-to-face meetings?**

In keeping with the government's current advice it will be very difficult for charities to hold face-to-face meetings. Some charities have clauses in their governing documents that allow them to meet virtually or to use telephone facilities. If your charity does not have this clause we would recommend that charity trustees check their governing document and see if they have the power to amend their governing document to facilitate changes as to how or when meetings are held.

If your charity does not have the power to amend your governing document in this way or if your governing documents prohibits the charity to meet virtually and you decide to hold meetings over the phone or using digital solutions, you should record this decision and note that you have done this to demonstrate good governance of your charity and in keeping with the government's advice. The Commission will accept decisions recorded in this way.

Responding to queries and requests

The Commission's office is not open to the public and all events and non-essential appointments have been cancelled. Staff will still be working, either remotely or from the office, and will endeavour to respond to queries and requests received as soon as possible. However, in light of expected staff absences over coming weeks, there may be a delay in responding to your query or request. We appreciate your patience and apologise for any inconvenience this may cause.

Serious incident reports

The Commission understands that many charities may be affected by the current COVID-19 situation. Should charity trustees decide they are temporarily closing their charity to manage this situation then there is no requirement to issue a serious incident report to the Commission. Charities should continue to issue serious incident reports for all other matters where appropriate.

Accounting Matters

The Charities SORP Making Body has issued guidance on practical accounting matters which you may find useful. This advice can be found here: <https://www.charitysorp.org/>



The charity register search



Online services for charities



Concerns about charities

