

Urgent energy advice for village halls this winter

This briefing is intended to help those who manage England's 10,000+ rural village halls save energy and manage increasing bills this winter.

The current energy crisis is having a profound impact on many individuals and organisations in society. A large number of people are unfortunately at risk of finding themselves in fuel poverty this winter. In this context, ACRE is committed to helping village halls stay open for the benefit of their local community as they are often the only place in rural areas where people can socialise and stay warm. In August we published a [briefing¹](#) summarising the challenges facing village halls and made several policy recommendations to make sure halls receive support to continue serving local residents.

The following advice draws on feedback from our members and specialist input from our corporate partner, Utility Aid who provided a view on managing contracts with energy suppliers to mitigate the risk of additional, unforeseen costs.

Key actions for village hall management committees

We encourage all village halls to use the current crisis as an opportunity to appraise opportunities for saving energy. Reducing energy consumption will help you to better manage your bills. It will also reduce your impact on the environment and contribute to a cleaner, more sustainable world.

Many of the following actions are practical and can be undertaken without delay.

- Monitor your energy usage – take regular meter readings and keep a record.
- Check bills carefully to ensure you are being billed for the actual amount you have consumed – make sure the committee as a whole take responsibility and don't expect just one person to deal with it.
- Consider carrying out an energy audit to identify opportunities for making your building more energy efficient – contact your local ACRE Network member for more information and guidance.
- Review hire charges – but be realistic and talk to small groups that may not be able to afford to hire your hall if charges increase substantially.
- Ask your Parish Council if they can help the hall by providing a grant towards running costs.
- Take simple steps such as putting up notices to encourage users to shut doors and turn off lights.
- Consider improving the insulation of your building as a priority.

¹ <https://acre.org.uk/briefing-rising-energy-prices-and-village-halls/>

- Take a look at other advice, suggestions and funding opportunities published by the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE): <https://www.cse.org.uk/>

The energy market is rapidly changing, as is the support on offer from government. As such it is important, that you closely monitor relationships with energy supplier. As the leading energy broker for community and voluntary organisations, [Utility Aid](#) recommend the following urgent actions:

- If your hall is out of contract or if this is up for renewal imminently, you should sign into a fixed protected contract for at least 12-months without delay. This will avoid eye-watering “out of contract rates” and give your hall and committee some budget certainty and security. Any hall on a fixed contract will continue to receive government support and this will be shown on their bill as a discount.

The Government bill relief scheme has a maximum discount and if you remain on out of contract rates you risk your prices going above the threshold of the maximum discount the Government will give.

We understand that managing utility contracts can be complicated, particularly given the current circumstances. If you require additional help or advice, Utility Aid offer the following services to village hall committees:

- Invoice validation – check your bills, identify errors and find out whether your committee is paying the correct levels of VAT.
- Help switching to green tariffs and get ongoing support with Net Zero and energy management.

Utility Aid are also developing a scheme that will allow village halls to join together and make collective purchases of energy. Details will be announced once this is up and running.

Complete this form to contact Utility Aid and request support: <https://utility-aid.co.uk/contactform/acre>

Don't forget ACRE Network members provide a wide range of support and advice for village halls. You can always contact them with any queries and questions you may have <https://acre.org.uk/acre-network-directory-map/>