**BRANCH COMMUNITY SUPPORT – WARM SPACES**

***A guide for branches wishing to support the ‘warm spaces’ initiative***

With the cost-of-living crisis, some people are finding it difficult to heat their homes, manage day to day bills or access social activities. The Warm Spaces / Warm Hubs initiative has been growing across the county; it aims to offer a warm, safe, public space for people to spend some time, have a hot drink and find camaraderie with others. You can find more information here: <https://warmspaces.org/about> If they need it, they can also be signposted to other services offering specialist support. The Warm Spaces initiative is not about providing accommodation and properties should not act as ‘warm spaces’ overnight.

We know that branches and clubs are asking about how they can be involved and Warm Spaces is a way for our members to support camaraderie, link with their communities and show kindness to those in need of support. As such we are bringing Warm Spaces in as part of our Branch Community Support offer, so you must be a registered branch to participate. Once you are registered please use this short guide if you are planning to participate in the Warm Spaces initiative.

The Warm Spaces aspect of BCS is different from coffee mornings, breakfast clubs or other social activities your branch may offer. Your warm space is a separate activity which is time limited to the colder months and is targeted at those struggling during this period.

**Initial Steps:**

1. First you need to check with the branch that they are keen to support the Warm Spaces project – the decision to do so must be recorded in the minutes of your branch meeting. This means you can also check how many members will be available to support your Warm Spaces sessions.

2. Next you need to be sure that the RBL building you plan to use fits the bill. As the RBL has a range of buildings which are already used as a meeting or socialising spaces, as long as the building continues to be used for this purpose as part of the Warm Spaces scheme it would be covered through our property insurance and public liability insurance. Please complete the short form below and send it to: [CommercialAdmin@britishlegion.org.uk](mailto:CommercialAdmin@britishlegion.org.uk)

* The property team will check that the RBL have insured the property and it isn’t on a list of vacant properties list. If it is classed as vacant, the building and those in it are not insured for use until the legal team confirm it is so.
* The property team will check whether we need to conduct additional H&S checks, will ensure current H&S requirements are updated and make any adjustments to ensure the property is suitable.

3. You need to register to be a BCS Touchpoint before running a Warm Space. You can do this by accessing MAP then clicking on Branch Community Support Information. If you are not already registered for BCS then you and any other members wishing to be involved will need to attend a short training session.

**Planning and Preparation:**

4. You should link with the lead organisation or statutory body for Warm Spaces in your area, if there is one, as they will bring you into the organised local scheme. This may be your civic authority or Community Voluntary Service (CVS). If you complete an internet search for Warm Spaces or Warm Hubs in your area, you should be able to find the contact details. If you are asked to sign a contract, then this **must** not be signed until it has been checked by our legal department to ensure that the RBL can meet all the requirements.

5. There may be increased daily use so the fixtures, fittings and furniture must be checked regularly for safety.

6. Find out what the building’s maximum capacity is. This must be adhered to and should form part of your plan – where will you refer someone to if they turn up but your Warm Space is full?.

7. Carry out a risk assessment for providing the Warm Space – this should include lone working risks. Also carry out risk assessments for any activities planned for those using the Warm Space.

**Running Your Warm Space**

8. As the Royal British Legion has defined beneficiaries - the Armed Forces Community – you must ensure that you are reaching out to that community to invite them to use the warm space. The people using the building as a warm space may not all be from the Armed Forces Community, but this should be your focus.

9. Using branch funds to support your Warm Space. You may use Branch funds to purchase refreshments for the beneficiaries accessing your Warm Space – this should be logged on your branch accounts as BCS spend. The individuals using your Warm Space may be there because they are struggling financially, so it is advised that you do not put a set price on any refreshments and, while a donation tin can be put out, you should not expect a donation.

10. You need to agree the opening hours and be able to stick to these. These should be during the day rather than in the evening. The branch must ensure there is at least two members present whenever the building is open, but depending on numbers you may need to have more members present. At least one member present must have completed the BCS training package.

11 You must have details of the RBLs Contact Centre number so that you can signpost to our welfare services, including Everyday Living grants, and other local support for anyone struggling financially. Branch members must not offer any welfare support or financial advice to individuals using the Warm Space.

12. You should have details of other organisations who can provide support if the individual is not a member of the Armed Forces Community. When you become part of the local Warm Spaces / Warm Hub scheme you should be linked to other organisations in your local area which you can signpost to. The local Warm Spaces / Hub lead may also provide you with additional Winter Warmth materials may also be available for particularly vulnerable individuals.

13. Please keep a record of your Warm Space sessions including the numbers attending, by accessing the BCS reporting app. This enables us to track the great work that you are doing!

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| **WARM SPACES - BRANCH REQUEST** | | | | | |
| Name of Branch: |  | | | | |
| Contact name: |  | | | | |
| Contact details: |  | | | | |
| Name and Address of  Property Proposed for Warm Space: |  | | | | |
| Is the property a Branch / RBL owned property? | | | | Yes | No |
| Is the property currently used for social activities: | Yes | No | Meetings? | Yes | No |
| Proposed opening hours for Warm Space: |  | | | | |
| **Property Team Comments and Recommendations** | | | | | |
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