ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

Central News – July 2022

Inside this issue

Title	Page	Summary
Important dates	1	What's coming in the next couple of months
Branch Property Trust	2	BPT Area Trust Funds Update
New Joiners	2	Find who joined your Branch by checking the MAP reports
Branch Compliance	2	Meet the team and learn more about compliance reviews
Branch Accounts	4	Tips on how to submit your Branch Accounts

Important dates	
16 July 2022	Membership meet-up Newcastle
30 September 2022	Branch Accounts submission deadline

Please remember to use this online form to share your feedback about Central News.
Some of you reported that not all links in the previous issue worked correctly. Please email dnikolakopoulou@britishlegion.org.uk with details of any links you cannot access.

BPT Area Trust Funds Update

An Area Trust Fund is a pot of money that can help provide services to the people we support in a particular geographical area. The money comes from the sale of local branch properties. The Area Trust Funds continue to provide a vital source of finance, enabling us to continue supporting people through challenging times despite a significant reduction in RBL income. In total, the Area Trust Funds provided £16.2m of welfare funding in 2021. This money made a huge difference to those in need in the Armed Forces Community.

For more information, you can read the June update here.

Find out who joins your Branch every week

Did you know that you can find out who joins your branch every week by checking the latest reports on the Membership Administration Portal (MAP)? A weekly "New Joiners" report is generated alongside the other MAP reports if there were new joiners in the previous week.

Branch Compliance

Audit, Compliance & Investigations Team – An Introduction

What the Team does:

The Audit Compliance and Investigations Team, under the Head of Internal Audit, is responsible for assessing and reporting on compliance with Legion rules and regulations in relation to:

- Branch/County activities – These compliance reviews mainly concern financial and governance matters.
- Poppy Appeal fundraising - These reviews concern Community Poppy Appeal activities, i.e., those of volunteer Poppy Appeal Organisers and associated volunteers.

The team is also responsible for investigating allegations of financial fraud or theft.

The team is independent of management and the activities they review. They report functionally into the RBL Audit & Risk Committee (A&RC) and administratively through the Director of Finance & Commercial.

The team consists of:

- Kate Wildman – Audit Compliance & Investigations Manager (kwildman@britishlegion.org.uk)

- Elwyn Pickering – Senior Compliance & Investigations Auditor (epickering@britishlegion.org.uk)
- Jane Brown – Compliance & Investigations Auditor (jbrown@britishlegion.org.uk)
- Steve Gelder - Compliance & Investigations Auditor (sgelder@britishlegion.org.uk)

The team can be contacted on their individual emails or by using their generic email address – AuditComplianceInvestigations@britishlegion.org.uk to discuss any concerns that you have.

Account reviews - Background

Each year a number of RBL Branches are selected to have their branch accounts reviewed by the Audit Compliance & Investigations Team.

The request for a review can be received from various sources and the reasons are varied, but the vast majority result from the failure of a branch to comply with the policies and procedures set out in the Royal Charter and Membership Management Handbook.

The purpose of a compliance review is to identify what has gone wrong and the underlying reasons why. These are then outlined in a report distributed to the appropriate RBL County and Head Office Depts; to enable them to assist the branch through a mixture of education, training, support and, very occasionally, more direct action. The overarching reason for this is to protect RBL charitable funds.

Most Common Reasons for Non-Compliance

This can include (but is not restricted to):

- Failing to submit annual accounts by 30 September
- Bank balances that exceed the maximum allowed to be held locally (£5k Max)
- Holding more than one local bank account
- Not using SOP 42 Volunteer Expense Claim forms
- Not having a full complement of Branch Officers
- Excessive or inappropriate Ceremonial expenditure
- Fundraising expenditure that exceeds income
- Processing annual Poppy Appeal income through the account
- Using charitable funds to support associated clubs.

What is examined during a compliance audit?

The branch will be asked to provide:

- The branch ledger / cashbook / spreadsheets showing income and expenditure
- Cheque books, paying-in books, bank, and BFI statements
- Payment & Receipt vouchers; together with supporting invoices, receipts, and expense forms
- Branch meeting minutes showing the authorisation of expenditure
- Other appropriate documents, such as asset registers and Independent Examiner (IE) reports (if applicable).

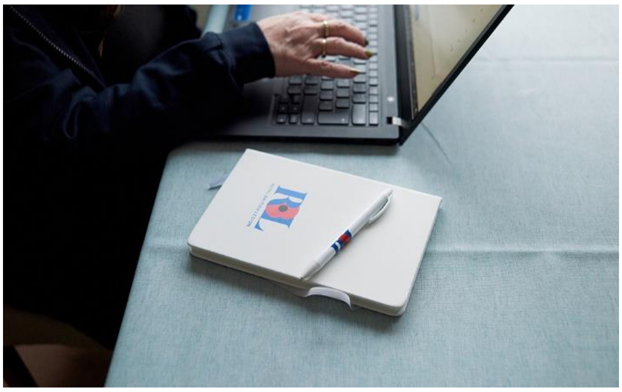
This will normally cover a three-year period but remember that financial records are required to be retained for seven years.

How can an audit be avoided?

- Having a good understanding of RBL financial policies and procedures and applying them
- Timely submission of accurate annual returns
- Seeking advice when unsure from your MSO, RBL Independent Examiner, the Branch Accounts Team or the Audit Compliance & Investigations Team.

Branch Accounts

It is the Branch Annual Return season again!



We have now reached the Financial Year-end 2022 and all branches should have received your year-end Accounts Pack either by post or e-mail from your MSO. If you haven't received anything yet, please reach out to your MSOs as soon as possible indicating if you need an emailed pack or postal pack and this will be sent to you as soon as possible.

Here are some important tips:

Is everything the same as last year?

- Broadly speaking, yes. The most important change is to ask you to send in a copy of your grant agreement/award letter if you are declaring any external funding income received on your return.
- For a full list of the specific minor changes made, please see your cover letter posted to you, or page 3 of the guide.
- The key things to remember are, you can still submit a 'small' return if you qualify according to

the criteria in the guide (page 6, same criteria as last year) however you still need to send in a year end bank statement with it. This return does not require an ATDI form to be submitted too, or to be independently examined.

What are the benefits of completing the electronic Excel template return rather than a paper copy?

- Totals will be populated automatically throughout meaning you can't make a mistake when adding up!
- There are a number of built-in checks which will alert you to any identifiable errors/omissions when you are preparing so that these can be fixed before you submit and will reduce the chances of your MSO/finance having to reach out to you later on with follow up queries.
- Reduced processing time for the finance team, which will improve the response time for queries from finance where they are necessary.

What is your point of contact for queries?

- Contact your MSO in the first instance with all queries.
- Contact branchaccounts@britishlegion.org.uk if you are unable to reach your MSO or they are unable to help you.

It's ok to wait for the deadline of 30th September to submit the accounts, isn't it?

- Returns should be prepared, examined if appropriate and submitted to your MSOs in the required format in time for them to review and upload to the finance team by 30th September 2022 so please do not wait until the last day to send them to your MSO.

Where to send the completed return?

- E-mail to your MSO wherever possible. Even if you have completed a hard copy form, if you are able to scan/take a photo and email this in, this helps us reduce the amount of physical post we have to process at head office.
- If you are unable to email completed returns to your MSO, send your return by post using recorded delivery, addressed to: Branch Accounts Team, Finance Department, Royal British Legion, Haig House, 199 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1AA. From here, we open the post and scan in the returns and email them to the relevant MSO for checking. Hence, if you can email them directly to your MSO in the first place, it will speed up the process immensely.

Are there Branch Treasurer courses available?

There is still time to attend the online Branch Treasurer course – it only takes a couple of hours and can be done from the comfort of your home! Our previous attendees said they would recommend the course to other members for the ease of use and effectiveness of the learning material. If you want to find out more please contact membershiptraining@britishlegion.org.uk.